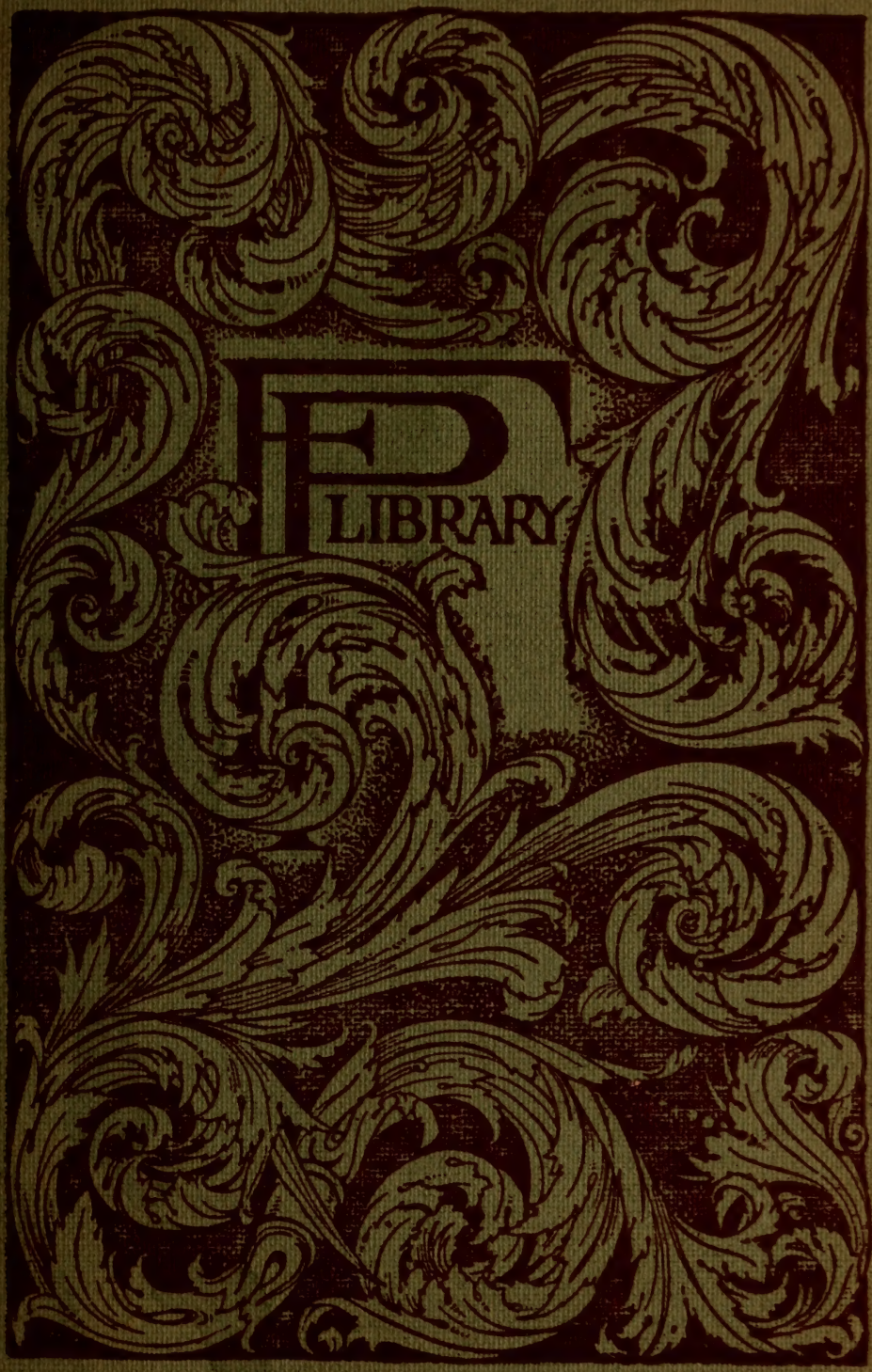
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MORMON VALLEY

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BY

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Henry James O'Brien
1887-1949

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MORMON VALLEY

I

THE PATRON OF ART

HAVING risen an hour later than usual, John Marsh leisurely consulted a memorandum pinned to the wall, and set about making a scrupulous toilet.

"Half an hour for dressing!" he observed complacently. "This is great! One of the idle rich at last—no subway rush for mine this morning!"

John Marsh was about to see New York City on a working day, and that great city was about to see him.

John Marsh had not lost his job, as one might suppose. He was a perfectly good draftsman in the offices of the Hammond Construction Company, and some day would become a constructing engineer, if his application were ever honored. The chief clerk, however, had been gathered to his fathers; an old employee of the firm, the day of his funeral had been set aside as a holiday.

After breakfast, the next item on John Marsh's schedule called for the luxury of a walk downtown, via Fifth Avenue, as far as Twenty-third Street. There he would have an uninterrupted two hours of browsing amid the luxuriant old bookstalls.

Circumstances, however, combined to interrupt the smooth flow of his carefully-planned holiday. At five minutes past nine Marsh passed the doors of the

Sanderson Art and Auction Gallery, which had just been opened to the day's bidders. After a peep inside the doors, he entered and slid into an inconspicuous seat. There was being sold, it appeared, an infamous collection of alleged Chinese art.

Due perhaps to the auctioneer, perhaps to the very slender assembly of bidders, no great interest was aroused in the alleged Chinese art.

At length, in despair, the auctioneer took down a kakemono, a picture representing a horse beside a tree, with an adjacent Chinaman who was apparently devoutly interested in the tail of the horse. The colors were grays and browns on the faded brown silk panel, with the single exception of the Chinaman's robe; this was voluminous, and of a softly shimmering red, a dusky, rich, wonderful red.

"Gentlemen, look at this!" pleaded the auctioneer, almost with tears. "Ancient painting on silk; I may state positively that the piece dates back from the Chien-lung period, and very probably from the early Ching. What am I bid?"

Some one indicated that his pleasure was represented by the sum of five dollars, whereat the auctioneer fell to work—in vain. No second bid was forthcoming. John Marsh, meantime, felt himself lured by the magic words, "Chien-lung—early Ching!" and by the dusky shimmer of the Chinaman's red robe.

"For the last time!" The auctioneer's gaze roved entreatingly from face to face. "For the last time, gentlemen! I cannot sell upon one bid. Five dollars I am bid on this most exquisite work of art—do I hear twenty? Ten? Eight? Seven? Six?"

"Six!" said Marsh—and then damned himself for an utter ass.

The kakemono was knocked down to John Marsh for six dollars. He sought the street, the long

parcel beneath his arm. He was not happy over his purchase.

"What the devil did I buy this thing for?" he asked himself, and muttered the obvious reply. "Six dollars! Now I'm stung, and serves me right for butting into an auction sale. What'll I do with this cursed thing all day?"

A ready solution came to mind. The firm's offices were but three blocks distant, and despite the holiday some one was sure to be there. He could leave the ungainly package in his own desk.

Reaching his place of work, he took the elevator to the Hammond Company's office floor, wearing a consciously guilty air. As he had expected, the offices were open, and a stenographer in attendance, who informed him that no one else except Mr. Hammond was around.

Tilting up his drafting board he unrolled his purchase and spread it out upon the board. Then he lighted his pipe and assumed a critical air. For all he could tell, the thing had been painted a thousand years ago —or yesterday. The dusky red robe made a gorgeous spot of color. Marsh suddenly broke into a chuckle.

"Old boy," he soliloquized aloud, "you are certainly a peach of a hypnotist! If——"

He paused suddenly at sound of a sudden exclamation behind him.

"Bless—my—soul! Marsh, what's this I see?"

Caught! Marsh stifled a groan as he turned, to behold the new head of the firm standing behind him and gazing fixedly at the kakemono. If Marsh were any judge, Hammond seemed rather excited; the crisp iron-gray mustache was bristling and behind the pince-nez Hammond's keen blue eyes were very intent.

"H'm!" Hammond grunted. "Where on earth did you pick up this thing? It seems about ready to fall to pieces!"

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes!" Marsh bit hard on his pipe stem. "I don't suppose the average person would take a fancy to it, Mr. Hammond—these old Chinese things require cultivated tastes to appreciate 'em—like ripe olives."

Hammond continued to stare at the picture as if fascinated.

"H'm!" he grunted again. "Marsh, I didn't know that you went in for this sort of thing!"

"I don't." Marsh grinned. "I get thirty-five a week, which does not allow of liberal expenditures. Still, an occasional extravagance——"

"'Tisn't much of a picture, is it?" broke in Hammond. "As a work of art, I mean."

"Well, sir, there's art—and art!" Marsh nonchalantly exhaled a cloud of smoke. "I just bought this on my way downtown; happened across it by a streak of pure luck, and have really had no chance to examine it closely. However, I'm positive that it goes back to the Chien-lung period, and very probably to the—er—early Ching."

"Bless my soul, Marsh! Why, my boy, I never suspected this trait in you!"

"What? Extravagance?"

"No—appreciation of Chinese art! It's quite a hobby of my own, you know! But what, if I may ask, induced you to buy this picture? There's not an atom of color in it except that red robe!"

"That's why I bought it." Marsh seemed not to observe that his auditor swallowed hard. "See how that robe stands out, Mr. Hammond? Wonderful bit of color. I have my own ideas about the picture, but I haven't verified 'em yet, of course. What's your honest opinion about it?"

Hammond expanded, and donned his glasses anew.

"A cursory opinion, of course—h'm! You seem quite correct, my boy, in identifying it with the early Ching period. Where did you find it?"

"Sanderson's. Cost six dollars."

"Six dollars!" Hammond muttered something under his breath. Then he again gazed at Marsh. "May I ask if you have taken any steps to verify your—er—your ideas about this picture?"

"I've only just bought it," and Marsh laughed. "I've a pretty solid notion what it is, but—well, that robe, you know——"

"Marsh, you're a positive genius! Some people are born that way, with the ability to ferret out these things, or to strike on them by a lucky chance! See here, I'm having Mr. Herschel, one of the Metropolitan curators, up to dine with me to-night; he's going to pass on a couple of Ming tiles I just bought, and I wish you'd join us and fetch this thing along. What say?"

Marsh murmured his assent to the invitation.

On returning to his own office, Hammond had evidently neglected to close the door. He was now, it appeared, talking over the phone, for his heavy, clean-cut words carried distinctly to Marsh's ears—and his voice was sharpened by the excitement of the collector.

"Herschel, don't you dare fail me to-night!" he was declaiming stridently. "What do you think has happened? I just discovered that one of my boys here in the office is a regular Chinese art critic—yes, sir! He bought a kakemono at Sanderson's this morning for six dollars—and it turns out that it's one of those rare precipitate-of-gold affairs. If it's the real thing——"

A door slammed and the strident voice was cut off. But Marsh had learned enough.

"Precipitate of gold!" he muttered, rising and staring down at his purchase. "Well, that's something to go on. I can get a quick lunch, then go up to the Metropolitan for the afternoon and get down a little patter about Chinese art. John, you have

to do it! If you confess to the old man now, he'd fire you!"

The Metropolitan Museum being established for the purpose of disseminating knowledge, and John Marsh having put in a feverish afternoon in search of knowledge, he arrived at the Hammond residence that evening with a great jumble of information on Chinese art—all of which vanished precipitately at his introduction to Miss Elsa Hammond.

Thereafter, with one notable exception, Marsh forgot everything except the young lady whom he took in to dinner. The exception came when Curator Herschel, who was a pedantic little old man, said something about Sung period porcelain. Marsh happened to receive the remark, thought it was aimed at him, and nodded sagely.

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Herschel! It's very beautiful stuff. In that sale I attended this morning there was a fine piece of scarlet porcelain that looked as if it might have been Sung. A very odd—er—celadon, I believe it was."

Instantly he perceived that somewhere he had made a fatal error. Clinton Hammond gave him a glance whose uplifted brows tokened pitying surprise.

"What, Marsh! Sung porcelain in red? You never see any old Sung that is not blue!"

"I didn't say it *was* Sung; I said it looked like it!" retorted Marsh.

"And," put in Herschel with a keen look of interest, "it may have been Sung, Mr. Marsh. You're mistaken, Mr. Hammond. While all the older Sung pieces usually found are blue, still they made it in all colors."

Result—amazed triumph for John Marsh.

Dinner over, Hammond led the way to his "trophy room," followed by Herschel. There was no Mrs. Hammond; and Elsa, who was off to an opera party,

said farewell to Marsh and left him with tingling finger tips. Sighing, he followed his host.

In no long time he learned that the picture which he had purchased for six dollars had no equal except in a famous Detroit collection. The title was "Old Syce and Travelling Horse," and the robe of the syce had indeed been painted with precipitate of gold by one Chang Mow.

When Herschel made his farewells, Hammond halted Marsh with a curt speech.

"Hold on a moment if you've no engagement, Marsh! I want a word with you."

Ten minutes later Marsh reclined in an easy-chair and eyed Hammond with uneasy anticipation, which deepened upon the offer of a fresh superba.

"Well, I have two things to discuss with you, Marsh," said Hammond slowly. "First is this kakemono. See here, I'll be frank; I want to buy it, if you'll sell the thing. You heard what Herschel said, that its value might be anything. Will you sell?"

"I'll sell," responded Marsh, "for one thousand dollars."

"Whew-w-w!" Hammond whistled. "Nine hundred and ninety-four dollars profit—say, Marsh, you'll do! Upon my word, you'll do! It's a bargain. I like your style, and that brings us to the second subject under discussion."

He paused to select a fresh cigar for himself. Marsh with difficulty repressed his emotions. Certainly this was proving one great little old day for John Marsh!

"The second affair is business." Clinton Hammond dropped his benign attitude; now became his alert, crisp business self.

"Glad I dropped onto this real ability of yours, Marsh," he continued. "And didn't I hear you telling Elsa at dinner that you'd had a thorough engineering education?"

Marsh nodded.

Hammond inspected the rather rugged features of Marsh for a moment.

"Have you ever been West?"

"Yes. I worked on reclamation projects during two college vacations. That's all."

"Good enough. We're considering, Marsh, taking up a project of that sort; not as a company investment, but as a private enterprise, and we've taken over thirty thousand acres of State land on the California-Nevada line.

"This land of ours is at present worth a few cents an acre, being desert. But in the hills there is a natural pocket—which is on our land—and all this pocket needs is a dam to make it an all-fired big reservoir. Further, we reach good water in and around this pocket at a depth of two to three hundred feet. Do you get the idea?"

"Of course!" The eyes of Marsh gleamed with interest. "Pump up the water, fill the reservoir, establish an irrigation system—and sell the twenty thousand acres! If you're sure of your facts, it looks like a howling success. Of course, it's going to take money."

"It takes, but it also makes, my boy! The land will sell for from three to eight hundred dollars an acre; reclaimed desert land, in a long valley such as we've found, will grow anything. But, after the land is sold, our company retains the water works—and sells the water, thus producing a perpetual income. Looks good, eh?"

"Uh-huh." Marsh's enthusiasm was relegated to the background by a corking idea which had come to him—and which he nursed in silence for a space.

"Then here's the point. Will you, Marsh, resign from the Bryce-Hammond firm and take up the job of constructing engineer for this company we've formed? Don't," and Hammond held up a pro-

testing hand, "don't think me a fool, Marsh. I realize you've had practically no experience, and I'll keep a string on you by having Ashby, who's constructing that Colorado bridge for which we got the government contract, run over from time to time and act as consultant with you."

"Oh! Then who'll be in charge?"

"You will be—unless we fire you. Salary, three thousand a year and expenses, and a permanent job with the firm if you make good."

Marsh inspected the end of his cigar thoughtfully.

"I'll tell you," he returned, choosing his words. "I——. Are you going to sell stock?"

"No. Privately subscribed."

"All right. Then, Mr. Hammond, suppose we argue on this basis: Instead of paying me a thousand for that kakemono, give me stock in this company; instead of three thousand salary, make it one thousand and the other two thousand in stock; with a further bonus of four thousand in stock if the work's completed in first-class shape!"

"Bless—my—soul!"

Clinton Hammond regarded his employee in unqualified admiration.

"Young man," he observed dryly, "you have nerve—and my judgment of you is sustained. So you have faith in this prospect, on my bare word?"

"I have faith in your judgment."

"Then you're the man to work for and with me," said Hammond bluntly. "Your proposal goes, Marsh! I'll set aside the stock in your name, and on the day the job is done to my satisfaction, you get it. How soon can you leave?"

"As soon as I can pack a grip."

"Good! Report to my office at ten to-morrow morning, we'll spend two hours on the plans, then you can take the night train west. Know anybody

you want as assistant? Of course, he'll have to have technical training."

Marsh thought fast. There was a young fellow in the office—Abraham Levy, who slaved eighteen hours a day.

"There's Levy, in the office," he said. "A French Jew, and smart as a steel trap. He's working half the night over a correspondence course, and getting more out of it than ninety per cent. other men would get. Give me Levy, and I'll answer for results."

"All right." Hammond rose. "Now, my boy—one thing that lies outside your routine instructions. Elsa is a bit run down from a winter on the go in New York and she's going to spend a few months in the Southwest with me. I'll take personal charge of that Colorado River bridge, and when I'm compelled to come East, she'll remain. Just where we'll stay is not decided—but here's the point. I want you to run a clean camp; get me? You can't make a model of it, but you *have* to run it clean."

"Thank you, Mr. Hammond—it shall be done."

Their hands gripped, and John Marsh went home.

II

MORMON VALLEY

"*Dieu!*" breathed Abraham Levy, as their automobile halted in the jaws of the pass where the dam was to stand, and he gazed out at the Mormon Valley desert with Marsh beside him. "This isn't a valley after all! *Mort d'Enfer!* It's plain desert!"

They left the car and its driver, and tramped up the hillside above the bowl where the reservoir was one day to form a lake. The depressing solitude of the eternal desert rested on all things like a blanket.

"It's wonderful!" Levy's sombre eyes glowed with strange lights. "You've given me all this, John Marsh—and I'm grateful."

"Given you—what?"

"This!" Levy's hand swept around the horizon. "To-day it is desert. To-morrow we build and live; the next day we create! It is the dream of an idealist——"

"It's hard work," and Marsh grunted. "And it's going to make us or break us, Abe!"

John Marsh did not lack the vision which inspired his assistant, but he did not talk about it. The dream of constructing, of creating, was his in full measure; but combined with this, and a part of it, was an almost savage reckoning with the practical end of the affair.

It was a month after Marsh's arrival that Ashby, chief of construction on the big Colorado bridge job, came unheralded to Mormon Valley.

Left by his auto on the edge of camp, the engineer surveyed the scene in astonishment, finding neatness and order where he had expected the opposite. The laborers' shacks stood in a long double row, dominated by the company store. On the opposite side of the huge bowl stood headquarters, also hastily built shacks, while a concrete building to replace these was in course of construction.

Water was being produced in abundance, and concrete mixers rattled and pounded, while at the edges of the great natural excavation gangs of men were busily at work excavating for the massive walls which would complete nature's original job. Ashby wandered on, critical yet uncriticizing; turning a corner of the hill trail, he came on a man standing idle and surveying the work below.

At first glance Ashby did not know him—robust, burned black, corded sinewy neck and arms, khaki clad.

"Marsh! 'Pon my word, I didn't recognize you!"

"Glad to see you, Ashby! Well, I guess the desert *has* changed me a bit. Come over for inspection?"

"Don't call it that, Marsh; a visit, that's all. If——"

"Wait!" Still in the act of shaking hands, Marsh halted the other and turned toward the group of men below. "Look down there, Ashby. It's my assistant, Levy; he's engaged in forming his own status here, and in settling the jests of our boss foreman, Dan Kelly. Dan is the big fellow with the fiery red thatch—see him? He doesn't like Jews. There, he's telling Abe about it now. I told Abe to plant that wagon spoke handy and take no chances—"

He broke off, leaned forward, and uttered a subdued exclamation.

"Got him square over the ear—did you ever see

a man go down quicker? That Levy is chain lightning!"

"Either Levy kills him with that club," observed Ashby dryly, "or Kelly kills your assistant later!"

Marsh laughed.

"You lose. Nothing can break Kelly's skull; I know, because we had a grand fight with all rules barred, and I had to trip and kick him behind the ear to lay him cold. Now he's my lifelong friend, and he'll be the same with Abe—especially as Abe is from France originally."

Many of the laborers, in Mexican fashion, had brought their families along, and these lived in one quarter of the residence street. For the others had been erected a long dining room, which with the adjacent kitchens were in charge of Mrs. Dan Kelly. Across the depression, however, Marsh had established his own officers' mess under the supervision of Lan Ying, a Celestial desert rat who had turned out to be a fair cook.

Here dwelt and messed, besides Marsh and Levy, the other upper-crust men. Randall and Crowther were two broken-down surveyors, men of education, but ruined by drink, who had drifted into camp and now held positions of minor importance. The bookkeeper, Sanders, was a first-stage consumptive from Chicago—a little, old, wonderfully efficient man whose errors were nil. Last but not least, was Dundas, the storekeeper.

Dundas entered the mess room after the others, except Levy, were assembled. He was a large man of indeterminate age; extraordinarily handsome, apparently a gentleman, ever dressed with scrupulous care, he was the mystery of the camp. He had applied for the position which he held, and filled it to a nicety—yet he was very evidently more than a storekeeper. A silent man, he said little, and Marsh asked no questions.

Presently Levy came in, to be greeted by a general grin, for his recent business with Kelly was no secret.

"Did you put the foreman in the hospital?" queried Ashby, on shaking hands.

"*Mon Dieu, no!*" In times of stress, Levy's expletives assumed quite a French touch. "Dan Kelly is one good sport, and we have shaken hands. Thank the good God I shall have no more to fight!"

There was a general laugh. Marsh, however, caught in the pale, steely-blue eyes of Ralph Dundas an oddly satirical gleam. There was something in those steely eyes that Marsh did not fancy.

Luncheon over, Marsh, Levy and Ashby forgathered with the construction plans, and for half an hour Ashby went over figures and drawings. At length he laid them aside.

"Please don't think me patronizing," he said quietly, lighting his pipe the while. "I am older in experience than you chaps—that's all. I don't think you quite realize what you're doing to this work here."

"Eh?" Marsh's eyes glanced out swiftly. "What have we done wrong?"

Ashby laughed.

"Nothing—and everything! You two fellows have taken over a job that's absurdly easy from a technical ground, and have made it a work of art!"

"Is that praise or blame?" demanded Levy.

"It's very hearty congratulation, youngster! You're not wasting material, yet you've not planned so much as a retaining wall that's not got an artistic touch to it!"

"That's Abe's doing," said Marsh. "He's a fiend for appearances."

"But it couldn't be done without your solid mathematics!" cried Levy warmly.

"Boys, you're all right!" Ashby exclaimed. "Add ten per cent. to the strength of those dam

buttresses, Marsh, and your figures will be absolutely safe. One thing more: Look out for the shoulder of that south hill, where you're planning to base the second largest wall; look out for the geological formation there, since you may have to blast away the shoulder in order to reach bed rock. But see here; this is only the start, you know! I don't want to horn into your game, Marsh, but if you don't mind the question, what kind of a camp do you propose to run here?"

"Clean," Marsh answered at last. "Is that what you mean?"

Ashby nodded.

"On my way up here I dropped onto some information."

"Spill it!" Marsh tipped back his chair, his eyes narrowing.

"There's an exodus on the way here, for the papers have published the company's general plans. There'll be a town here some day—see the idea? Meantime, you'll have several hundred laborers whose wages make good picking. Well, I have reason to believe that a regularly organized expedition of vice is marching to the assault, my son."

"Let 'em march," and John Marsh chuckled. "We own this land—they don't!"

Ashby glanced up at the big map of the company's property, which hung on the wall.

"Where's the State line?" he asked briefly.

Marsh met the frowning gaze of Levy with dismayed comprehension.

"That hadn't occurred to us," he returned slowly. "Of course, they can establish themselves over the line."

"The worst part of it all is, Marsh, that the exodus is organised. I don't know who's behind it—nor does any one else; yet it seems, from what I gathered, that a town is to be built there, a regular

town of organized vice, which in course of time will become the town of Mormon Valley. The promoter or promoters will then eliminate the vice, and grow rich on real estate!"

Ashby rose.

"However, run your own game, and here's luck! I must be getting back. By the way, Marsh, Mr. Hammond arrives on our job the end of next week. I presume he'll be running over here later on."

"Thanks!" Marsh nodded, a gleam in his gray eyes. "I'll get right to work on a place for him."

That afternoon Marsh and his assistant faced facts, but found no remedy.

"Look here, Abe, whoever starts that vice city will clean up a fortune—not on booze and its allies, but on real estate! After annexing our pay roll, they'll annex the benefits of our work, by having their town established over there."

"We can shut 'em out of electricity and water," said Levy.

"They can drill for their own water, and—by my hand, Abe! You've hit it!" For a long moment Marsh sat staring up at the map on the wall. Then he sprang to his feet. "Call Randall, will you?—or rather, send Lan Ying after him!"

A moment later Levy returned hastily.

"What's the idea?" he exclaimed.

"Something you'll have to keep secret—even from Randall!" Marsh faced him, gray eyes, blazing. "We'll let these fellows go ahead across the line, Abe, but we'll have our men survey a road through the hills, and lay off a gang to grade it roughly—a road to nowhere! Now look here, at the map."

He eagerly pointed to the corner of the company lands that adjoined the reservoir site—a flat inlet of the desert, around the corner of the huge butte which would form one support of the dam.

"Here's the place, Abe! Randall can run the

road lines to here, without knowing why—and when we're ready, we'll put up a town of our own! Get that, hombre? You'll do the platting yourself, and I'll help; keep the plans secret, get everything ready, and then—biff! Throw the whole force at the work and get it done at one blow! Can we do it?"

Levy's eyes widened in comprehension.

"*Diantre!*" he swore vehemently. "We can! We'll have electricity and water there to burn—direct from the dam! We—but here's Randall."

Randall entered—a quiet man of middle age, gnarled with desert work. Marsh swung around and motioned him to a chair.

"Randall, I understand that back of our property, just across the State line, there are to be some saloons established. We can't prevent it—and how's it going to affect us?"

The surveyor rubbed his neck, and shifted his gaze to the window.

"I dunno," he said lifelessly. "Reckon I know how it'll hit me—damn it, we can't get away from it! I'm no liar, Mr. Marsh; nor is Crowther. We're partners, sink or swim, and while this camp's dry we've been dry. If it goes wet—well, you know the answer."

"And you'd prefer to keep it dry?"

"If we could—but we can't. The booze gets in, sir. It just gets in."

Marsh nodded, understanding the man's attitude perfectly, and turned to Levy.

"Shall we go out and see about that line we want surveyed?"

They left the office in silence. As they passed the dining room, Lan Ying appeared in the doorway and waved a dish towel at Marsh.

"Hey! Missee Malse! You step along me one minute."

Marsh strode to the doorway and took an object which Lan Ying extended with the comment that he had found it under the luncheon table. It was a small photograph, and as he gazed at it, John Marsh felt a strange sense of incredulity—a numbing clutch at his heartstrings.

For the photograph was set in a thin silver frame, and on the under side of the frame was scratched the name "R. Dundas." The face of the photograph was the face which had haunted him during the past month—the face of the girl whom he had met once, whose hand he had clasped once, never to forget—Elsa Hammond, younger but unmistakable!

Bidding his assistant take charge of Randall and the proposed work, Marsh abruptly turned aside and took his way across the hollow toward the store, leaving the other two staring after him.

Dundas was in the front of the store, and at Marsh's nod he swung outside.

"I believe you lost something in the mess room this noon, Dundas," said Marsh quietly. "A photograph. Can you identify it by name?"

The words carried a distinct shock to the other man. For an instant the mask of Dundas was stripped away; his hand shot to his pocket, and his coolly handsome face suddenly leaped into life. Some emotion had bitten into him, and had bitten deeply.

"Damned careless of me!" he ejaculated. "Photograph of a lady, Marsh. An old—an old friend of mine in the East."

"Her name?"

"Eh? What the devil——"

"Don't flare up," said Marsh. "I happen to know her, that's all, and I want you to identify the picture before I return it."

The blue eyes were very steady on his, but they were filled with so tense a light of anger that Marsh was amazed. Then, unexpectedly, Dundas laughed.

In mirth, even more than in repose, the masterful character of the man made itself felt.

"Don't be a silly ass, Marsh! The photograph has a silver frame, and on the under rim is scratched R. Dundas. I think that's identification enough."

Marsh could not do otherwise than hand over the picture. Dundas nodded, thanked him, and turned into the store.

Two days later came Colonel Zadkiel Newgate.

A big man he was, big and black; beard-black of cheek, dressed in tailored black from scarf to heels, with a great diamond sparkling at his throat and another on his hand. His deep black eyes were set close on either side of a curved and predatory beak, and from beneath his wide-brimmed black hat flowed waves of raven hair. Such was the man who sought out Marsh.

"My name, suh, is Zadkiel Newgate, late colonel on the pussonal staff of the Geo'gia governah, suh!" he announced, in a pronounced Southern accent. "Ahe you, suh, Mr. Marsh?"

"That, sir, is my name," returned Marsh gravely, taking the extended hand.

"May we speak in private, Mr. Marsh?" The colonel produced cigars. Nodding, Marsh bit at a weed and walked away from the staring Mexican laborers.

"Well, Colonel Newgate?" he inquired, turning and facing his visitor.

"I have come, suh, on a delicate mission," announced the other. "I wish to ask if you, suh, will grant me a concession, of co'se in return fo' a financial——"

"What kind of a concession?"

"One, suh, fo' the pu'pose of impahting amusement to the vulgah crowd." The colonel swept his hand toward the nearest group of workmen.

"This camp is dry, if that's what you mean," said Marsh. "It remains dry."

The colonel winked one predatory eye.

"I may say, suh, that the financial consideration involved is in the sum of five thousand dollahs, suh——"

Marsh caught sight of the red thatch of Dan Kelly passing, and hailed the foreman.

"Dan, this is Colonel Newgate. He has just offered me five thousand dollars for the privilege of selling liquor to our workmen. You will kindly point out to him the boundaries of our land, and impress on him the lamentable fact that if he or any of his friends intrude further on such errands, we'll put 'em in a mixer and wash their souls clean. That's all. Good morning, colonel!"

Half an hour later, Kelly reappeared, still grinning.

"Boss," he said, with a shake of the head, "that omadhaun is the Ould Nick himself! God bless us all! They's trucks out yonder, and workmen, and they're buildin' a shantytown out behint the property line in Californy!"

"Thank you, Dan. We're helpless, in that case. Just do your best to keep liquor out of camp."

So for the present, Marsh dismissed the matter; he was too busy even to go forth and view the new Gomorrah—Colonel Newgate's town of Mormon Valley, California.

Late into each night, Marsh and Levy worked over their secret plans for the town of Mormon Valley, Nevada. They had plenty to keep them busy in this respect, and also in the line of regular duty. A comfortable shack was made ready for the Hammonds, and the work progressed steadily —but trouble was in the air.

At length, one noon, Dan Kelly invaded the officers' mess with definite information.

"Boss, where it come from, dommed if I know!"

he stated, standing in the doorway and addressing Marsh. "But they's whisky—I can smell it in them greaser shacks! The truck dhriver says the rules don't apply to truck dhrivers!"

"Oh, don't they!" snapped Marsh, rising.

Levy winked at the others, and, a moment later, led them forth to witness the proceedings.

When they were gone, Dundas stood in the door of the mess shanty, and, with a pair of binoculars to his eyes, scrutinized the road that came down through the low desert hills. Presently he turned back to the table, his lips compressed in a thin line, his pale-blue eyes very cold and hard, and hurriedly finished his meal.

Meantime, Marsh and Kelly found the truck driver in question seated outside the men's mess house, with a crowd of Mexicans grouped around him.

"What's this I hear, Valdez? That you have brought whisky into camp, declaring that my rules are not for you to obey?"

The man rose.

"No, sir—I said the rules did not apply to truck drivers."

"You knew better," declared Marsh quietly. "Go over to Mr. Sanders and get your time, Valdez. Now, men," and Marsh turned to the others, "Valdez has given some of you whisky. Where is it?"

There was no insubordination. Three men produced half-empty flasks, which they passed forward. Marsh threw them against the house.

"Now, men—after this, take care! Whoever has liquor in his possession on this property will lose his job."

He was interrupted by a sudden snarl from Valdez.

"What you mean? Am I fired?"

"Exactly."

"Maybe," and into the swarthy face crept a sneer,

" maybe you have Dan Kelly put me off, like you did the big black man—Colonel Newgate! Maybe you afraid yourself, eh?"

Marsh's hand leaped out, caught the shoulder of Valdez, and jerked the man forward.

" Go to the store and get your time!" he snapped. " Then hike."

His answer was a rush—Valdez meant fight!

A vicious, cunning fighter, Valdez aimed for the body alone. A good forty pounds lighter, Marsh was borne back and swept off his feet by the sheer weight of the man's rush. He fell, with Valdez on top, and the two men whirled over and over in the dust.

So keen and tense was the interest, that no one observed an automobile which drew up in the road, thirty feet away, its occupants staring at the scene.

Marsh rolled clear of his opponent and sprang erect; he caught the rising Valdez with a right swing that knocked the man six feet away, and, disregarding Dan Kelly's yell of " Take the boots to him, lad!" leaped after Valdez with fists clenched. Before he could land the finishing blow, Valdez came up within his arms and clinched savagely.

The clinch saved Marsh, for the other man had no notion of infighting. Valdez tried to break from that desperate clinch, but could not. The fists of Marsh beat up in choppy blows that had the force and regularity of a pile driver; the two men stood almost motionless in the dust, but speedily a choking cry broke from Valdez, who flung wide his arms. Marsh's fist came up and drove home—and Valdez fell to one knee. He looked up, gasping, speechless, and raised an arm as if to shield himself.

" All right," panted Marsh, turning. " Dan! Take this fellow over to Sanders, then see that he gets out of camp, will you? I——"

A yell warned him and he ducked—barely in time.

Valdez had come up from the ground like a rubber ball, a knife gleaming in his hand!

It was over in a flash. One of the Mexicans, perhaps having anticipated such action, threw out a jagged chunk of rock that struck Valdez squarely in the cheek; the man fell motionless, insensible. Marsh stooped and picked up the knife.

"Thanks, my friend—whoever you were!" he said, facing the Mexicans. "I'll revise orders, Dan! Get Doctor Weld!"

"Here I am, Mr. Marsh," and the surgeon came forward, kneeling over Valdez. Then another voice fell upon the ears of Marsh—a voice that caused him to whirl in amazement.

"Bless—my—soul! Marsh, is this you? What does this rough-house mean?"

Marsh faced Clinton Hammond; and seeing the automobile in the road, understood that Hammond had come upon him in an evil moment.

"By cripes!" roared Dan Kelly, in his vast mirth, quite ignorant of whom this visitor might be. "By cripes! It manes that the lad is runnin' this here works, it does! Which same was gen'rally accepted before, but is now a matter o' bare bald fact, mister!"

"Oh!" Clinton Hammond's eyes twinkled in comprehension, and his hand came forth. "I see! And that's exactly what he's here for, my man. Marsh, glad to see you!"

"I guess you saw me," and Marsh chuckled. His gaze swept up to the automobile and paused in consternation. "Great Scott! You haven't ladies with you?"

"Sure! Elsa and a friend—hold on! Where are you going?"

"For a wash," flung Marsh over his shoulder. "And clothes."

He made a running exit from the scene.

Twenty minutes later, bearing no visible marks

of his recent encounter, John Marsh shook hands with Elsa Hammond and her friend, a by no means unattractive young lady by the name of Virginia Stevenson.

"I'm awfully sorry you came—just when you did," said Marsh, reddening as he met the clear gaze of Elsa Hammond. "Unfortunately——"

"Oh, we've heard about it!" and Miss Stevenson laughed. "Don't offer excuses, please! I always did want to see a real fight! And when that man flew at you with the knife, you should have heard Elsa scream!"

"I didn't!" disclaimed Miss Hammond quickly. "You screamed yourself!"

"We all screamed," and Hammond turned to them with a chuckle. "Marsh, I certainly did the right thing when I put you two on this job!"

Marsh and Levy together stood confused, speechless. Hammond slapped them on the back with a ringing laugh.

"All right—I'll not torment you! Good work, both of you; this place looks fine, and I've had an excellent report from Ashby. When do we eat?"

An hour later, Marsh and Clinton Hammond stood together watching the work of construction. Finding no criticism, Marsh knew that his work was good.

"What's that aggregation of shanties we passed just before getting here?" said the older man abruptly. "Looked like saloons and worse, Marsh."

Marsh nodded. "Yes, sir. It's just over the California line." He told of the visit of Colonel Newgate "So far, we can't touch the scoundrel. I'm having notices posted now, warning all intruders off our property, and I've written asking that the sheriff from Las Vegas, the nearest Nevada county seat, come over here and make me a deputy. We can't keep California clean, but we'll keep this camp clean."

"That's all right. Fight 'em, and I'll back you up!"

Later in the afternoon, Marsh showed the two young ladies over the works; and, not without a brooding anticipation, conducted them to the store. Somewhat to his surprise, Dundas emerged from the doorway, smiling, and advanced with outstretched hand.

"Why—Miss Hammond! What on earth brings you here?"

"Ralph! Upon my word!"

Miss Hammond shook hands enthusiastically, and introduced Miss Stevenson. Marsh stood by, making no secret of his amazement; whereupon he learned that Dundas and Miss Hammond had been friends at college, that Dundas had been "out of the world" for three years, and that no end of people back East were "just dying" to know where he was. Dundas corroborated this with a nod and a glance at Marsh that told of malicious pleasure.

"Yes—had to come to this country for my health," he said. "Then I met with financial reverses; in short, I am now a storekeeper and taking pride in my work!"

"Why are you doing it?" asked Miss Hammond.

"To eat," and Dundas laughed heartily. "I've got some other enterprises that will enable me to go home a rich man within a year, Elsa. Until then, however, I must work."

Clinton Hammond strode up, shook hands with Dundas without displaying any great enthusiasm, and presently the party of inspection moved on.

It proved that Hammond himself was returning to Pahrock and the Colorado the next day, but would leave Elsa and Miss Stevenson here indefinitely. Conditions at the camp of the Colorado job were very unpleasant. He arranged to have horses sent over, and Mrs. Kelly consented to come up and keep house for the two girls.

"What's this new road that Randall is working on?" demanded Hammond that night, while going over the plans.

Marsh, having debated whether or not to reveal all he knew, had decided against it.

"We'll use that road," he responded truthfully, "to bring down supplies without passing through Mormon Valley. I'm going to shunt Colonel Newgate off the map if possible."

Thus closed the day whereon the two fair denizens of Mormon Valley, Nevada, made their arrival. That there were other and less fair denizens, but also in the feminine plural, at Mormon Valley, California, was a fact rumored throughout the camp; and the next day being Saturday, Marsh in the morning summoned to him Dan Kelly and Crowther.

"I take it," he said quietly, "that you two men are not yet under the spell of our friend Colonel Newgate. From remarks here and there I gather that he is to have a grand opening to-night, and our men will probably be on hand to contribute their pay to him."

"Not all," said Dan, shaking his head. "Them byes in the married row is steady ones, boss. Them greaser women is hellcats on the poor divils! They'll stay to home, I'm thinkin'."

"Select a few of them, then, you two—and search every man returning across the line. If any are bringing liquor, fire 'em on the spot. That's all!"

Twenty-eight drunk and unlucky gamblers lost their money and their jobs that night. So far, it seemed to Marsh as if he were winning every round, with his town-site project in reserve as a final crusher. Marsh, a few days later, was constituted a deputy sheriff and the company's property was definitely closed to all outsiders.

III

COLONEL NEWGATE ENTERTAINS

Elsa Hammond and Virginia Stevenson made of their abode a pleasant oasis of civilization for the camp officers. Every evening some manner of entertainment was under way, and during the long days the two girls rode or played tennis on an improvised court. Miss Stevenson was an ardent art student, and spent much time with her canvases, but Elsa Hammond seemed never to tire of watching the construction work, throwing into it something of her father's keen ability and energy.

The days passed swiftly, winged with labor, and as they passed, Marsh was ever more aware of a tensity rising betwixt him and Ralph Dundas. It was a thing of silence, not of words. Dundas seemed a welcome guest at the Hammond cottage as were the others.

The activities of Colonel Newgate were bearing fruit. Accidents increased greatly among the workmen, as did fighting, and stabbing affrays only ended when Marsh confiscated all the weapons in camp.

On a Sunday afternoon, when Dundas was not in evidence, Marsh and Elsa Hammond were riding over Randall's new road; Marsh, in response to her inquiries, set forth frankly the damage that Newgate was doing.

"These Mexican laborers don't seem such a bad lot," said the girl reflectively. "Why don't you try to offset the trouble by encouraging them to

save money? You might agree to save a certain proportion of their wages, to be applied on the purchase of company land when the work is done!"

"That's not a bad notion, Miss Hammond; but I've no authority to do such a thing."

"I'll give you the authority! What does it matter who buys the land? If——"

"Then write your father, if you will," said Marsh soberly. "Put it up to him, and if you can get him to assent to the scheme, we'll try it!"

"On condition you'll appeal to Newgate to meet you halfway—to sell liquor, if he must, in limited quantities to each man."

Marsh assented, merely because Elsa Hammond asked it. He knew the utter futility of such an appeal, but because it was her wish, he set himself to face Newgate.

The opportunity came unexpectedly, as opportunities do. Barely had they returned home when, as Marsh was unsaddling, Crowther came up wearing a troubled look. Miss Hammond had gone within the cottage.

"What's the matter, Crowther?"

"Well, sir, I'm afraid you'll have to get another man to fill my job."

"Eh?" Marsh straightened up, staring at the surveyor. "What's the matter with it?"

"Nothing. But you know Randall and me are pardners, and we—well, we've been in this here camp quite a spell, Mr. Marsh. We ain't saints, you know."

"Maybe not, but you're mighty useful men. Where's Randall?"

"That's just the hob of it, sir. He's gone over to shantytown," for so Newgate's collection of shacks was termed, "and I reckon I'll go along too."

"So you're quitting your job for a grand spree and a move somewhere else?" Marsh eyed the

man in contempt, that suddenly changed to understanding and warm sympathy as he discerned the struggle in Crowther's desert-seared face. "Here, old man! You don't want to quit—you're just loyal to your pardner, eh? Well, hang on a bit. I'm riding over to the town this minute, and I'll send Randall home if you think it'll do him any good. Would it?"

"I—I reckon it would, Mr. Marsh. With me, I kind o' tag around where Randall goes; but if he thought anybody else reckoned him of enough account to go pullin' him out of trouble, why, it'd be a power o' good to him!"

"All right. Stick around and watch out for him, will you? Think he's drunk?"

"Who—him? Lord, no! He's only been gone an hour. He won't be drunk till to-morrow some time!"

Marsh nodded, swung up into the saddle, and cantered off, leaving Crowther staring after him in rugged emotion.

The buildings before which Marsh drew rein were unpainted but imposing, huddled in a hollow of the desert hills as though transported there by a magician's wand. The Mormon Valley Hotel was the central structure—a large affair which on close approach disclosed an anatomy of timbers covered by tar paper, tin, and painted canvas. As Marsh dismounted, the black-clad figure of Colonel Newgate appeared in the doorway. The colonel was beaming, and advanced with outstretched hand. Marsh forced himself to shake hands.

"I rode over to have a talk with you, colonel, if you can spare the time. First, however, I want to get hold of one of my surveyors who's here—Randall by name. I presume you'll have no objection to my sending him home?"

To his surprise, even to his amazement, Colonel

Newgate clapped him heartily on the shoulder. The predatory black eyes twinkled.

"Suh, this heah camp is at your command! Enteh, suh!"

Marsh entered, an ironical smile tugging at his lips. He found himself in a large room adorned by a bar and card tables. In the corner was a roulette wheel around which was a three-deep crowd of Mexicans. The dance hall was adjoining, as evinced by the strains of a tinny piano and a squeaky violin, voices, and the shuffle of feet. Colonel Newgate indicated a faro table, from which Randall was rising.

"There, suh, is your friend!"

Marsh faced Randall, and smiled slightly.

"Take my horse and look up Crowther, will you?" he said. "Two of those cuts on the new road are away off level, and Crowther wants to go over 'em with you before dark."

Without further heed to the man, who departed at once, Marsh swung about to Newgate.

"Well, colonel, where can we have a chat?"

Newgate beckoned him to a door at the end of the bar, which opened into a room plainly furnished, with a large safe in the corner. Newgate shoved chairs to a center table.

"Be seated, suh! May I offer you cigars?"

"No, thanks." Marsh met the predatory, glittering eyes, and set forth his case bluntly. "Colonel Newgate, I've come over to find if there isn't some way we can get together on the liquor question. If you would be willing to establish some rule about selling each man so much whisky and no more——"

"Entirely, suh!" Newgate's features beamed amazing delight. "Now, Mr. Marsh, I am not a drinking man myself, and I respect the scruples of othehs, suh; will you join me in a bottle of gingeh ale, suh? Let us discuss this matteh in amicability, suh!"

Marsh nodded. Newgate went to the door and opened it.

"Two bottles of gingeh ale!" he boomed, and returned to his chair.

Marsh began to wonder if he had been utterly mistaken about this man.

Doctor Weld, Levy, and Marsh were expected at the Hammond cottage that evening, for a chafing-dish supper. Sunset came, but no Marsh turned up. At that instant came a knock at the door. The surgeon opened, to show Ralph Dundas at the threshold. Dundas bowed slightly.

"Why, where have you been all day?" demanded Miss Stevenson from the kitchen. "We've not seen a thing of you, stingy hermit!"

"I've been communing with the desert," and Dundas laughed gayly. "But may I speak with you a moment, Mr. Levy? Pardon me, ladies——"

"Sure! Excuse me a moment, Miss Hammond." Levy came to the door, and with a jerk of the head Dundas beckoned him out. "You haven't seen Marsh, have you? We've missed him."

"Yes, that's just the trouble. Marsh has been over at the town, and I just now saw him coming back. He's outside camp, reeling drunk, with Colonel Newgate on one side of him and on the other one of Newgate's dance-hall girls. You'd better get Doctor Weld."

Levy called the surgeon, and the three men strode away past the office. Behind them, however, undeceived by Levy's casual pretexts, the two girls stood at the cottage door and watched the trail in frowning uncertainty.

After all, it seemed that Dundas had been mistaken. Instead of Marsh coming by the upper trail along the rim of the basin, by which Dundas set forth with Levy and Weld, he came across the basin itself, evidently having paraded through the camp quarters.

Thus they failed to meet and stop him, turning back too late as they sighted his pitiful progress.

Swearing great oaths in French, Levy turned and ran back, saw the two figures at the cottage door, and knew that the worst had happened. He met Marsh by the office, within easy earshot of the Hammond cottage.

Marsh, however, did not know him—reeling, stumbling through the sand, and mumbling to himself, Marsh knew nothing at all. Levy caught his friend's arm from the clutch of the painted woman, and half flung the reeling engineer to the embrace of Doctor Weld. Then he faced Colonel Newgate with blazing eyes and clenched fists.

"What—what d'you mean by this?" he cried hoarsely. "You damned rogue! How——"

The colonel drew himself up with pompous dignity.

"Suh," he declaimed, "kindly undehstand at the outset my position! Mr. Marsh came to my hotel, suh, to send home a man named Randall who was there. He remained, suh, to speak privately with me. It is not my province, suh, to control the passions of men. Mr. Marsh desired to drink, and he drank. Out of the goodness of my heart, I fetched him home——"

"You lie!" cried Levy brokenly. "Marsh never drinks! You lie!"

The dance-hall woman had slunk away into the gathering shadows. Colonel Newgate drew himself up, bowed toward the Hammond cottage, and spoke with unction.

"On a Sunday evening, suh, and in the presence of ladies, I do not choose to resent your insinuations."

In a gust of passion, Levy flung himself forward. His fist spatted against the mouth of Newgate, who went staggering back. Swift as light, the hand of the colonel flashed down and then up. There was

the quick, sharp bark of a revolver, and Levy, spinning around, flung out his arms and fell motionless.

It was not until the following morning that John Marsh wakened out of a deep slumber. As he stirred, a splitting headache quelled him again; but at the motion he found Doctor Weld leaning over him.

"Hello!" he muttered feebly. "Great Scott, but I sure have a head! Where am I?"

Weld drew up a chair, sat down, and told him where he was and how he had gotten there. Weld called a spade a spade.

"You fairly reeked with whisky," he concluded.

"See here, doc!" Marsh raised himself to one elbow, staring. "What's all this? You say Newgate—why, man, it's a damned lie! I never had a thing to drink except a bottle of ginger ale! And Newgate said I was drunk—the cursed hound!"

"To all appearances you were drunk," said the surgeon calmly. "But that's not all!"

He went on to tell of the shooting. Levy was not dead, nor was he near death; but he was in an extremely serious condition with a bullet clean through his body. The two girls had insisted on taking him in and upon nursing him, of which work they both had some knowledge.

"And Newgate!" exclaimed Marsh sharply. "They got him?"

Weld shook his head.

"No. He ran for it, Marsh. He has skipped clean, by automobile, and whether he'll be quickly located or not is not yet known."

Marsh's gaze bit into that of the surgeon. "See here, Weld! I'm no liar. Last night I drank a single glass of ginger ale; that's all I can remember. Newgate doped me—don't you see? The cursed dog meant——"

Weld determinedly shoved him back on the bunk.

"Lie down, Marsh!" he exclaimed sharply. "I believe you, of course. You stank abominably of whisky, but I remember now that it came from your clothes. By gracious, old man, I expect you're right! Newgate was trying to discredit you, sure enough. But—Randall has been hanging around, waiting to see you. If you keep quiet, I'll send him in."

"I'll keep quiet until he goes," said Marsh, his face drawn into tense lines. "Then I'm up and to business, doc!"

Weld shrugged his shoulders, and left the room. In a moment Randall entered and came over to the bunk. Randall flushed.

"Well, sir, I found out somethin' over there from hearin' them fellows talk. Didn't you think that Colonel Newgate was back o' that whole layout? Well, he ain't."

"Eh?" Marsh stared up at the man. "Who is, then?"

"I dunno, sir. But I gathered for certain that Newgate ain't the big gun over there. He's just playin' to be the boss, prob'ly to hide whoever is the real works."

Marsh nodded frowningly. Suddenly he looked up at Randall and flung a keen question.

"It's no secret that I was brought home in a disgraceful condition last night? What do the men say?"

"It ain't up to *them* to talk, sir. You was alone with Newgate, I gather, and what went on I don't know. But I'll gamble it was nothin' very straight, with him!"

Presently Marsh was up and dressed; food put some heart into him, and, feeling much more like himself, he left the shack and crossed to the cottage of the two girls. At his knock, Elsa Hammond opened the door—and did not ask him to enter.

"How is Levy?" demanded Marsh.

"He is in very bad shape, Mr. Marsh," she answered at length. "You have—heard?"

In her eyes, and in the indefinable quality of her voice, Marsh read that she thought the worst of him. He smiled faintly.

"I have heard all, Miss Hammond," he said quietly. "You have not judged me already, I hope? Last night I was drugged, not drunk."

He paused, seeing her suddenly shrink from him, pain in her eyes.

"Please—please do not refer to the subject again!" she said hesitatingly, yet with a decision and finality in her whole manner. "It is most unfortunate, Mr. Marsh, that we ourselves saw your arrival. I do not wish to discuss the subject further; after what we saw last night, there is no room for argument."

She closed the door and vanished. John Marsh turned away heartsick. Alone in his office, he wrestled with his problem, and found no solution.

Levy, who would stand by him through thick and thin, was gone. Newgate, whose forced confession might clear him utterly, was gone and might or might not be captured. Bitterly as he might deny this charge, Marsh saw that his own position was not enviable. Marsh realized clearly what had most deeply stung those two girls who had seen him brought home. The presence of that dance-hall girl, entirely unnecessary as an assistant, had been an infernally clever touch—by whom?

Who was the unknown enemy? Some one, evidently, who did not desire to be known, and who had used Newgate as a shield.

"Somebody must have concluded that Levy and I were dangerous," reflected Marsh. "We may have said an incautious word, or Randall's work on the new road may have led the enemy to guess what

we were doing around the corner of the hill! Great Scott—could that be it?"

He felt certain that the truth had flashed to his mind with that thought!

Raging with his own helplessness, Marsh left the office and went down to the work. He summoned all the foremen, and the harsh bitterness of spirit that was upon him did not lessen as he caught the glances and sly laughter of the workmen.

"My friends," he said curtly, "the occurrence of last night was unfortunate. You may think what you like; but I'm telling you as man to man that if a single word on the subject comes to my ears, if anybody thinks it's smart to hand me any talk, I'll beat up that man and kick him out—proper! I am not here to make any explanations. That's all."

They trooped away, Dan Kelly flinging Marsh a cheerful nod and grin as he went.

Marsh went to the store and found it in charge of Sanders. To his inquiry, the bookkeeper returned that Dundas had gone to Pahrock, in the endeavour to apprehend Newgate. The storekeeper ought to be back in camp by evening.

"If Newgate isn't found," thought Marsh, as he forced himself to take up the work on the giant retaining walls, "then I've got to face this thing down—and do it boldly. If Newgate is found, I'll force the truth out of him!"

Newgate was not found, however. Dundas returned that afternoon with word that the colonel had vanished completely, but was being diligently sought. He was very respectful, was Dundas, but his chilly eyes swept through Marsh with a satiric glitter which set the engineer raging. He felt that Dundas hated him.

For Marsh those were hard days that followed—hard days, during which Levy hung betwixt death and life. The iron drove deep into him, and rusted,

and the rust stain was good for his manhood. He needed iron in his system—the iron of repression, of suffering, of endurance. It gave eye and voice a new command, a new authority. It deepened the strong roots of his soul; it brought out his sharp loneliness, and his self-reliance.

No more was he the companion of the two girls on desert rides or at tennis or intimate suppers; they were very polite, and also very busy with Levy. So Marsh hardly saw them from dawn to dawn.

Indeed, Marsh himself had work and to spare. The pumping machinery had arrived, and needed to be installed and housed; the retaining walls were slowly rising; the great dam, which was to provide power, was gradually taking shape; there were a myriad of details to be handled every day—and one man to handle them. Further, there was the town-site matter; late into each night Marsh sat working over the plans which Levy had commenced, until at last he tucked away the finished blue prints in the safe to await the moment of action. To the same end, he increased his requisitions of material by degrees, gathering in gradual quantities the necessary building supplies.

Presently the men came to look up to John Marsh with a new manner of awed respect. As though his inner trials had been a consuming fire, his brain was burned clean and clear; with a word, an audacious order, a gesture, he solved the intricacies of the work upon the instant. He installed the machinery with a dexterity which left the machine men agape.

One morning Weld summoned him to the Hammond cottage. Levy was free from fever and had asked for him.

"*Diantre!*" exclaimed Levy, studying Marsh curiously. "You look ten years older!"

Marsh merely smiled. But Levy, although no word had been said, was quick to perceive the attitude

of his two nurses. Later, when he was walking about at brief intervals, he obtained from Dan Kelly the story of what had happened, and pieced it out from other mouths.

Gradually Marsh regained a more normal footing with the two girls, but the old comradeship was gone. When Elsa Hammond went over the work, it was with Dundas or Weld; between Levy and Miss Stevenson had arisen a companionship which drew them much together.

Such was the situation when Clinton Hammond arrived on a Sunday afternoon. He came unexpectedly and briefly, having run over from the Colorado work for the purpose of seeing his "little girl." Marsh, who was in the rear of the store going over the monthly report with Sanders, knew nothing of his chief's arrival until Hammond walked in on him an hour after reaching camp; Levy and Virginia Stevenson accompanied him, and he called Marsh forth curtly enough, to inspect the work accomplished.

Hammond said little, until, when he and Marsh had walked out alone on the crest of the rising dam, he laid his hand on the younger man's shoulder and spoke gravely.

"Marsh, I've learned what's happened here, and I've just this to say: Remember that you are in charge of this work! That's all. Now, tell me about that hill shoulder on the south side."

Was this simple comment to be taken as support or reproof? When, after Elsa Hammond had returned and borne off her father and Marsh was alone with his assistant, some of his inward queries gained response.

"I told him," said Levy quietly, upon Marsh mentioning what Hammond had said. "I thought it best to give him the straight of it before he got crooked information from—well, from other sources!"

"What sources, Abe?"

"Oh, any of 'em. Dundas, for instance."

"Eh? Dundas?"

Levy leaned forward and spoke gravely.

"Marsh, I've been thinking during my lazy interval. Why was it we didn't head you off from the girls that night? Because Dundas led us in the wrong direction. I don't think much of that fellow, and I'd put nothing past him. He doesn't like you."

"Nonsense!" retorted Marsh lightly, but said no more.

That evening there was a gathering in the Hammond cottage; it was Marsh's first visit in the role of guest since Levy had been shot. Dundas was, of course, present.

In the course of the evening Weld was hurriedly summoned by a Mexican to attend a man hurt in a stabbing affray at Mormon Valley. When the surgeon had departed, Clinton Hammond gave vent to an irritated outburst.

"Confound it! That liquor town is going to play hob with this work, Marsh! If we had only some way to put those crooks out of business——"

He paused suddenly, with the uneasiness of one who feels that something amiss has been said. Elsa Hammond glanced at Marsh, with a cruel smile. There was an instant of silence, before Marsh himself made quiet response.

"You're right, Mr. Hammond. If any chance presents itself, I'll take it; but so far it seems that we can do nothing."

Dundas leaned forward, his cool, masterful features intent on Hammond.

"If you say the word," he said casually, "I'll stop that liquor selling myself."

"How do you mean to do it?" snapped Levy. Dundas did not heed him.

"Yes, how?" repeated Hammond, astonished.

"Simply enough." Dundas relaxed in his chair

and held a match to his dead cigar, pausing until the latter was well alight. "I learned some time ago from friends of mine in Sacramento that Mormon Valley was to be established as a post office, in order to avoid sending all our camp mail over from Pahrock. I applied for the job of postmaster, and got it. Now, I can't take that job at any profit to myself; but if you can continue my salary I'll take it like a shot. Do you get the idea? I want both salaries. So, then, is it worth my salary to you, to make a dry town out of Mormon Valley? If so, just say the word, and after to-night not another drop of liquor is sold there."

"Bless my soul—of course it is!" ejaculated Hammond, staring at him. "But how the devil do you expect to stop it?"

"By force of character, Mr. Hammond! I shall simply order the bars closed and the booze sellers out of the town. You are thinking, I presume, that I have no official right to give such an order; quite correct. I have, however, the *nerve* to do it—and to back up the play."

So great was the man's actual power, that to none of his auditors did this proposal seem in the least grotesque. Never had the strength of self-repression in Dundas been so clearly felt.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Hammond slowly. "If you can do it—go ahead!"

"Then there'll be no more liquor trouble after to-night," said Dundas quietly, as though the fact were now assured.

Marsh left the room unobserved, except by Dundas, who glanced after him half frowningly. Trudging through the soft sand, Marsh crossed the brow of the hill to a great wind-blown and serrated ledge of rock that overlooked the moonlit desert below. He wanted to be alone. Something, perhaps intuition, had whispered a message to his brain.

"Dundas is not without friends, presumably in high places," reflected Marsh. "And he had known the Hammonds somewhat intimately in the East. Did he, then, know who was behind this reclamation project—even when it was a secret? Yes; he must have known that. The cool rogue! He had the nerve to tell Hammond to his face that before the end of the year he would go East a rich man! He sure did make an investment that promised to pay big dividends—an investment in booze and men and shanties!"

He stared out at the dim desert, a dark flush mounting to his brow, as he mentally pictured the activities of his late storekeeper—whose job would now have to be filled by some one else.

Behind Colonel Newgate, behind this shanty town behind the booze and women and gamblers, and behind the future town-site scheme at which Ashby and Marsh had shrewdly guessed, was Ralph Dundas! Here was the secret enemy, the crafty schemer!

The scheme in itself was in no sense nefarious. It was only logical to suppose that the company, when Hammond's attention should no longer be centered exclusively on the Colorado project, would seize upon its overlooked opportunity for making money; failing this, there was no reason whatever to prevent any one else stepping in and grasping the neglected forelock of chance. Such was business, legitimate business.

But the manner in which Dundas had gone about his scheme—this was what caused the hands of Marsh to clench in grim anger at the very thought!

"In the company's pay, and playing traitor!" he thought hotly. "Not scrupling to divert the pay roll into his own hands through the lowest channels of vice. Perhaps Newgate had orders to kill Levy—who knows? H'm! No wonder Newgate got away scot-free!"

And now Dundas, laughing in his sleeve, was throwing a gigantic "stall"—for whose benefit? Why was he pretending to march boldly into Mormon Valley and order out the liquor sellers—who were in his pay—unless to shame John Marsh in the eyes of Hammond and his daughter?

Suddenly a voice broke in upon his thoughts; a voice that told him Elsa Hammond had approached, unheard, in the sand.

"—and if you really can do it, I'll think it magnificent!" she was saying, in her voice an eagerness that thrilled Marsh wistfully. "But I'm so afraid it will be dangerous!"

The soft laugh of Dundas came to Marsh like the voice of an evil angel in the night.

"Dangerous? Not a bit of it! But, Elsa—when are you going to listen to me? You know that for years I've always reverenced your memory; you know that my heart has always been in your keeping—Elsa, when will you——"

Marsh rose to his feet confusedly. This eavesdropping was no fault of his—nay, it stung him too deeply!

"Oh, I've no intention of marrying any one, Ralph," and the girl laughed.

"You can't tell me that," broke in the voice of Dundas. "Elsa, don't you know that the light of love in your eyes, these last weeks here, has been like a biting spur to me?"

Marsh coughed and stepped forward. He saw the two figures just above him.

"I'm very sorry that I happened to be here first," he observed. "I——"

"No, no, Ralph!" The girl seemed to restrain some movement of Dundas. "Come, let's be strolling home," and her arm in his she turned her back to Marsh. "Gracious! This engineer of ours is positively ubiquitous, isn't he?"

They moved off and were gone.

Marsh stood silent, staring into the night. His thoughts moved riotously in wild tumult. So Dundas, the silent, crafty Dundas, loved her; which explained the incident of the photograph! And for "this engineer of ours" she held but scorn, the disdain which bit far deeper than any other feeling, the contempt which ignored utterly!

IV

TO ILIPAH

WITH the morning, Hammond departed to his own work again, leaving orders that the salary of Ralph Dundas was to be continued providing the man made good his word.

The first truck of the morning from Pahrock had brought the mail. Twenty minutes later, Marsh handed his assistant an official notification that hereafter all mail for the construction camp, instead of being handled through Pahrock, would be handled through the newly-established post office of Mormon Valley, California.

"'"*Dieu de Dieu!*" ejaculated Levy feelingly. "Stung again! Now everything we get will pass through the hands of our esteemed postmaster."

"Which suggests possibilities!" Marsh sprang to his feet and took from the table a pocket-map of Nevada. "'Wait a jiffy, Abe!"

Examining the map as he went, Marsh strode over to the store where Sanders was hard at work.

"See here, old dollars and cents," exclaimed Marsh laughingly, "you're promoted to the job of storekeeper. You'll also retain your old job, and I'll give you an assistant. Now, I presume Mr. Dundas kept an eye on the company's accounts?"

Sanders, meek little man that he was, removed his spectacles and polished them very carefully, then looked up with a twinkle in his eye.

"Well, Mr. Marsh, I wouldn't use that exact

expression. He was quite particular, however, to check over my figures and the requisition lists."

"Exactly!" Marsh grinned cheerfully as he met the tacit understanding in the gaze of Sanders. "Well, there's to be absolutely nothing doing in that line from now on—get me? Nominally, he retains his position as storekeeper—but if he wants to see any of your accounts, refer him to me and avoid trouble. And when you're sending out requisitions, just hand 'em over to me and we'll have the truck drivers mail them at Pahrock, for the present."

"Very well, sir." No words were necessary. Marsh felt that the other man understood perfectly, and was pleased at the order.

Returning to the office, Marsh spread out his State map on the desk, and beckoned Levy to his side.

"Look at this, Abe. West of us is Pahrock; but almost the same distance to the north, over level desert, is Ilipah, on the Las Vegas & Tonopah. I'm going to take our camp Henry to-morrow and go to Ilipah; the flivver can negotiate a road over the desert, and if we don't strike any patches of loose, shifty sand it will be a better road for the trucks than that through the hills to Pahrock."

Levy whistled.

"Going to shift bases, are you?"

"No—not entirely. But if the road's all right, I'll put one of the trucks on the Ilipah run, and get hold of a man who can drive the Henry each day as a stage and mail carrier. We'll get our extra stuff from Ilipah, for the town of Hammond."

"Eh?" Levy frowned perplexedly. "You mean—our town?"

"Yes. We'll make its name Hammond. You'll go to Ilipah with me to-morrow, and there take the railroad to Carson City. Rush through an incorporation of the town of Hammond; if you have to

interview the whole legislature, get this town established in a hurry, before any one wakes up to what we're doing! See the postmaster at the capital and arrange to have our mail come through Ilipah by stage here. Get Crowther appointed postmaster here. Then get back on the jump and go to work on the town. Sabe?"

"I sabe fine. We're going to fight?"

"Fight?" Marsh laughed. "No. We're merely going ahead with the Mormon Valley Company's work, Abe! Does the scheme suit?"

"Suit?" Levy's black eyes glowed with eagerness. "Why, Marsh, it's the dream of a lifetime!"

That afternoon, while Marsh was for the first time trying out the pumping machinery at one of the two artesian wells, Elsa Hammond appeared in the doorway of the half-finished building. Marsh hastily came forward, to meet her coldly level gaze. On swift impulse, he spoke.

"Please, Miss Hammond, allow me to express my regret over last night's unfortunate——"

She stayed him with uplifted hand, her voice quite cold.

"I did not come to discuss that, Mr. Marsh; kindly do not refer to it. We spoke some time ago about urging the laborers to save a portion of their wages toward buying plots of the reclaimed land—you remember?"

"Yes."

"Well, I just had a note from Mr. Dundas saying that his endeavor had been entirely successful; there will be no more liquor sold over the line there!" Despite herself, the girl's cheeks reddened slightly. "The gambling cannot be checked, however."

"Probably not," said Marsh, his voice like chilled steel. "The proprietor of that town must make money by some means! Gambling may prove very successful."

"The proprietor?" Her brows lifted. "To whom do you refer?"

"To whom else than Colonel Newgate!" Marsh shrugged his shoulders. "Well, Miss Hammond, what about the savings-bank idea?"

"I started to say that I asked dad about it last night, and he entirely approves. He has given me and Miss Stevenson authority to act, so we're going to be the bankers and handle the whole business. That is, of course," she added curtly, "subject to your approval."

"Your wish is my law, Miss Hammond," he made slow answer. "If you and Miss Stevenson will undertake this job I think you can do tremendous good! I'll have notices written in Spanish and posted up, then you can circulate and explain the scheme, if that's agreeable."

"Entirely so, thank you." With a curt nod, Miss Hammond departed.

Marsh and Levy departed at daybreak next morning in the camp flivver; their trip they explained as one of exploration merely, and they were off before the camp was well awake.

Marsh was keenly elated by the prospect ahead. If he encountered no sinks or old lake basins in the thirty miles to Ilipah the road would be much easier for a truck than that to Pahrock which led through the desert hills to the west of camp. Then, by throwing his force to work on the nucleus buildings of the town and by opening the road which Randall had graded and which avoided Mormon Valley entirely, Dundas would be left high and dry in the hills; the blow would be effective and lasting.

To their entire satisfaction, it seemed as though the gods were for once throwing favors into their hands. After leaving the almost indistinguishable confines of the depression which had been named Mormon Valley, they encountered desert as level

as a billiard table, of good gravelly sand which offered no great difficulties to an automobile or light truck built for the work. Traveling by compass, they tracked out a straight road that came out on the railroad within half a mile of their destination.

The town of Ilipah was not imposing. It consisted of a dozen straggling houses and stores, grouped around a hotel of adobe whose rooms were all on the ground floor, being no more than a chain of adobe cells linked together.

At the station, Levy found that he could get a train about three that afternoon for the north and Carson City; whereupon the two friends hastened to the hotel and with sighs of relief from the desert sun seated themselves in the fly-bitten dining room.

The noonday repast was rough, wholesome food; the same adjectives applied to the other men at the board—hardened desert workers, against whom a white-faced commercial traveler stood out in high relief. One of them chanced to be the owner of the garage, and with him Marsh fell into talk. Another was the real-estate agent, being also the mayor of Ilipah. With these twain, Marsh and Levy engaged in profitable discourse.

The mayor, by virtue of his office a booster of marvelous power, was swift to see that with Ilipah a partial base of supplies for the camp of Hammond, Ilipah was bound to benefit. And when the wide Mormon Valley was converted to farming land Ilipah would boom.

"I'm durned if we ain't goin' to lure you fellers away from Pahrock!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "That there is the no-accountest town I ever did see, that Pahrock. Now, if you was to put up a warehouse and we was to donate the land for it, I'll send through whatever orders to Las Vegas you want."

"In other words, act as our agent?" suggested Marsh.

"Yep! Glad to do it."

"Good! We'll pay you, of course; and if you can have the warehouse put up for us, it will be a big help. Now, I want to get hold of a man who can drive that flivver of ours as a stage between here and our new town of Hammond—there and back each day. By the way, Abe, we'll undertake to handle the mails free on that stage; don't forget to mention the fact at Carson City."

They adjourned to the drug store, which was also the local post office and general store, and in no long time all the details were arranged to Marsh's satisfaction.

The three-o'clock train came and went, bearing Levy away on his mission. Marsh then retired to the back room of the drug store, with the mayor and keenly interested postmaster; here he proceeded to make out an order for cement and other supplies to be brought up from Las Vegas at the earliest opportunity.

"We been thinkin' o' startin' a bank here at Ilipath," said the mayor, looking at the postmaster, who nodded sagely. "But blamed if I don't think she'd go better over to your place, Marsh! Now if me and Ike, here, was to throw in with two-three more friends of our'n and start up a bank, do we git the concession over there?"

Marsh sat down and lighted his cigar thoughtfully. A bank! This town project was certainly on the boom!

"A bank takes money," he began cautiously. The mayor chuckled.

"Oh, this here country is a long ways from busted! We got fifty thousand ready to shove into an Ilipah bank; but over at your place, now, with good irrigated lands, a bank 'u'd git so much money

shoved at her that she'd jest lay down an' holler for help!"

"I'll think over your proposition, my friends. Come over and take a look at us in a couple of weeks——"

He paused suddenly, the words dying in his throat. From the front of the store he had caught a voice which sent his face livid.

"What—who's that?" he said hoarsely, leaping from his chair.

"That," said the mayor, "is Bill Nickerson, which same we don't take much pride in as a prominent citizen, him being of recent origin here and unknown."

Marsh held up his hand, listening. Again that voice came, this time more clearly, as the speaker shot his words through the opening at the postal station.

"Good evenin', ma'am. Have you any mail heah, ma'am, addressed to Majah William Nickerson, late of Geo'gia? Pleased to receive it, ma'am."

Marsh turned and crossed to the side door of the building, which opened into the back room wherein they were.

"I'm a deputy sheriff, gentlemen, and that man is wanted for attempted murder in my camp! If you'll kindly allow me."

He saw the postmaster dive for a desk and yank open a drawer, but stayed not to see more. Throwing open the door, Marsh leaped outside and ran swiftly towards the front of the building. In this moment a wild exultation seized upon Marsh, as he mentally visioned the future, clear and unclouded; the plans already under way would strike Dundas a deadly blow—Newgate apprehended, would mean a confession from the rogue, and that confession might involve Dundas—nay, to save his own hide Newgate would certainly give away the game of Dundas! And what mail was Nickerson, as the

man now called himself, receiving? Who, except Dundas the master villain, knew how to reach Colonel Newgate?

A glance over his shoulder showed him the mayor and postmaster just leaving the back room, revolvers in their hands. Not waiting for them, Marsh strode forward to the entrance of the store.

As he reached it, there emerged the tall, black-clad figure of Newgate. Marsh halted. Newgate descended the step from the doorway.

"Mr. Marsh, suh!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly. You're under arrest, Newgate," snapped Marsh.

He saw the man's face change, saw the upcrawling right hand suddenly dart to the left armpit—and threw himself forward bodily, with a raging passion flaming in his soul.

His fist took Newgate under the chin, and sent the man staggering. He leaped after, and drove home a storm of blows.

Newgate was entirely unable to disregard the fists that smashed him backward—unable to take punishment while he could draw a gun. Instead, his arms shot out and he strove in a most futile manner to ward off the impending storm; fired by grim anger, Marsh gave him left and right, planting his blows almost at will. Before Newgate had recovered from the attack, Marsh was in upon him with a deadly swift series of short-arm jabs learned from Dan Kelly—jabs that rocked Newgate's head as if it had been on a pivot.

A moment later Colonel Zadkiel Newgate, alias William Nickerson, quietly slid to the ground and lay jerking one leg spasmodically.

"Wow!" gasped the mayor, coming forward and stowing away his weapon. "Here's the real old-time bad man clean knocked off'n his feet in two minutes!"

Marsh smiled.

"If you'll load this fellow into my car, I'll take him back with me—better take off his artillery first. Boys, this man is the dirtiest scoundrel who ever came into the desert, barring one other! Let me tell you what he did to——"

Marsh checked his words abruptly; he had done enough talking, and in the desert places the man who knows most is usually the one who tells least. Power is bred of reserve.

"Well," he went on, "never mind all this skunk has done—he's wanted for shooting up my partner, and that's enough! So if you'll load him into my car——"

He left them crowding about the figure of Newgate, stripping it of weapons, and walked over to his car. As he cranked up, the drab figure of a tattered desert rat approached, at his heels nosing his burros. From beneath a wide slouch hat gleamed a pair of twinkling eyes that surveyed Marsh and his car.

"That there automobile has got burros beat a mile, ain't it?" observed the prospector. "Does she go fast?"

"Middling," and Marsh laughed. "Can I give you a lift, old-timer?"

"Lord, no!" was the fervent response. "I'm goin' your way, but not in no automobyle. Piute Joe ain't interested in them things only at a distance. Tell ye what, though! I'll bet ye a hundred dollars I can set them jacks o' mine through places ye can't foller in that automobyle!"

"Nothing doing on that bet, Joe! I can't cross sinks or loose sand washes."

Having replenished his gas and water supply on arriving in town, Marsh had nothing to delay him. Willing hands bundled Colonel Newgate into the rear seat, and after rejecting the mayor's offer of a

revolver, Marsh waved adieu to Ilipah and sped out upon the desert.

A short distance from town he halted the car long enough to lean over and thoroughly search the pockets of Newgate, who was beginning to show signs of life. His search was rewarded by an envelope with inclosed letter, addressed to Nickerson in the handwriting of Ralph Dundas.

"Good!" Marsh shoved it into his pocket without further examination. "Now to get off to a secluded spot—then we'll have a war talk!"

Twenty minutes later the horizon had engulfed Ilipah. Marsh halted the car, turned and saw Newgate's battered countenance evincing bewildered curiosity as to his whereabouts, and grinned cheerfully at the man's scowling gaze.

From the envelope he extracted the letter. It was brief, and to the wild joy of Marsh, was all that he could possibly desire:

"My Dear N.: All is smoothing over nicely. Am running our own camp in person, and hope to get rid of Marsh before long, in which case can arrange for your return.

"Stick close to Ilipah during the next few days, as I may have need of you in haste. No further news, but watch the mails closely. Yours,

"R. Dundas."

Marsh refolded the note and replaced it in its envelope.

"Well, my dear Nickerson-Newgate, you have now a chance to moralize upon the evils of bad company! And now you face the penitentiary. I don't know how they do it out here in Nevada, but I hope they put you in the mines at hard labor! That is, if you choose to go there. We may strike upon a happy medium which will serve you and me both."

The eyes of Newgate quickened at this.

"How'd you-all know I was at Ilipah?" he demanded.

"Oh, the little birds told us! I'm sorry Levy missed meeting you; he took the northbound shortly before I discovered you. Well, do you prefer jail or freedom?"

Newgate raised one hand and tenderly examined his marred features.

"Don't tantalize me," he groaned. "My preference, suh, is obvious. You have conquered me in fair combat."

"Good! Now, isn't it perfectly true that you drugged my ginger ale at your camp that night? And you did it on orders from Dundas?"

"Between you an' me, suh, it is true!"

"And that Dundas is the man behind you and behind this booze town you opened up?"

In response to this, Newgate merely nodded sullenly.

"Then," pursued Marsh evenly, "you have two courses open to you. One is to go to jail and be prosecuted for shooting Levy. The other course is to come on to camp with me, right now, and there make public the corroboration of my statements which you have just made. Expose Dundas, exonerate me—and you'll go free."

"Yes! And Dundas will skin me alive!"

"He will—not! We've already got his town project uncovered and ruined. We'll be able to jail him for conspiracy against me," Marsh was hazy on the law, but spoke boldly, "and against the company also. We'll break Dundas, that's all!"

Colonel Newgate thoughtfully fell to making a cigarette. While awaiting a response, Marsh dropped into the car pocket the letter from Dundas. As safe a place as any, he reflected.

"I reckon we're headin' for Mormon Valley now?" queried the prisoner meditatively.

"We are, and we have a good night ride ahead of us."

Newgate tossed the stub of his cigarette out to the sand.

"You're a great bad man, you are!" Marsh surveyed his captive scathingly. "Climb in here beside me, and think it over! I want you where I can keep my eye on you."

He alighted, cranked up the car and regained his seat. Newgate groaningly stirred himself and came into the front seat also. Marsh started the car, following the tracks which he had made that morning, the trail was easy to make out, but after dark he would not dare hit up any speed because of the rough ground, so he made the most of the waning daylight.

Marsh set himself to show Newgate that Dundas was not to be feared. Necessity constrained him to detail his entire plan, for much as he detested Newgate, the man would prove an ultimate weapon with which to smash Dundas.

"Well, suh," remarked Newgate at length, "I'll go you!"

Ahead of him Marsh now saw nothing but undiluted triumph. Even should Newgate go back on his word and prove recalcitrant, there was the note from Dundas—abundant evidence in itself of the man's purposes and schemes!

"The evil days are over," reflected Marsh, in high spirits, as he piloted the car upon its uneven course. "Now I'm about ready to fight."

The swift sunset of the desert was accomplished, and as the purple shadows closed in, Marsh realized that he must light his car lamps if he would keep the road until the moon rose. Not neglecting to keep a watchful eye upon his battered captive, Marsh alighted and touched a match to his lamps.

What he did not observe, however, was that the hand of Colonel Newgate reached out and effected a

change in the throttle, then slipped down to the brake, and set it hard.

Marsh had never learned to crank a flivver with his left hand, so, leaning down, he naturally gripped the crank and hauled her over. His first and only intimation that the throttle was not as he left it, came in an explosive roar from the engine; one-tenth of a second later, he was limply hanging across the left fender, his right arm numbed.

And as he hung there, dazed, something struck him savagely across the head. And for John Marsh, the lights went out.

V

MURDER

JOHN MARSH had passed through a long and wearisome day. Consequently it was not strange that his unconsciousness passed into slumber, once the pain of his hurts had quieted down.

Slow and uneasy wakening came to him, with the morning sun striking upon his face and stirring him into life despite his drowsy turnings. For a space he sat up with his head in his hands, trying to conquer the stabbing anguish; the clotted blood on his scalp told him that Newgate had struck hard and pitilessly. Then, as gradual cognizance returned to his mind, he found his right forearm black and yellow—badly bruised, but not broken.

There was no sign of Newgate, nor of the old Henry in question; this in itself was not particularly amazing, because Marsh was already becoming resigned to the escape of his erstwhile captive.

But as Marsh gazed on the sand around him, he uttered a gasp of blank and bewildered unbelief, then clutched at his aching head.

"Am I drugged again?" he muttered, staring.

On the sand a few feet away from him reposed an object with which he was perfectly familiar, yet its appearance here was so utterly incredible as to leave him staggered. It was the safe of the Mormon Valley Company—the safe from the office of Sanders, reposing here on one side with its front door wide open—and nothing inside of it!

Bewildered, he looked up and searched the horizon, wondering if some genie or afrit had fetched that safe through the air and had dropped it beside him! He saw neither afrit nor genie; but, not far away and approaching from the direction of Ilipah, a tattered figure followed by a string of burros was heading toward him. It was no other than Piute Joe, the desert rat.

And in the opposite direction, Marsh saw what fetched him staggering to his feet—an automobile approaching from Mormon Valley!

Staring at the car, Marsh presently was aware that it was a brand-new flivver. With a shock of recognition he made out the figure of Ralph Dundas at the wheel, beside him Doctor Weld. Had Dundas bought a new car, then?

The head of Marsh sank again, between pain and dejection. With Newgate had gone all his evidence against Dundas; his conjectures had been confirmed, he had turned wild theory into definite certitude—and that was all. Until Newgate should be recovered, he had no grounds whatever on which to base an attack on Dundas. He looked up as the new Henry came to a halt before him, and eagerly advanced. Weld leaped to the sand and caught him as he reeled.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the surgeon. "Man—what's happened?"

"Got hit—on the head." Marsh essayed a shaky laugh. "How'd you know where I was?"

Weld looked up. Marsh followed the look, to meet the cold eyes of Dundas, smiling at him in a cruel fashion.

"Put him in the car, Weld," said Dundas, unheeding the query.

Gratefully Marsh relaxed in the shade of the car top, while Weld examined his hurts.

"Where'd this flivver come from?" he demanded. "Looks new."

"Belongs to Dundas. H'm! You're all right, old man."

To the indignant surprise of Marsh, Dundas leaned over and coolly "frisked" the pockets of Marsh before the latter could so much as object.

"What the devil——" Marsh weakly shoved him off. Dundas laughed coldly.

"You don't know what's happened—oh, no!"

"Eh?" Marsh stared at the speaker in wild surmise. "Say, are you drunk or crazy? Weld, how did that safe get here in the middle of the desert?"

To his amazement, Weld's lips tightened, and the physician looked away.

"I'm sorry, Marsh," he returned slowly. "Before we explain, do you mind telling us how you came here?"

Marsh did.

There was momentary silence when he finished.

"Have you any proof of this, Marsh?" said Weld gravely. "I have a reason for asking."

"Proof that I captured Newgate—yes!" Marsh pointed to the slowly approaching figure of Piute Joe. "Ask that old prospector, if you like. He was at Ilipah and saw it all."

Dundas laid a hand on the surgeon's arm.

"Weld, come and look at these tracks before they get mussed up, will you? Back in a minute, Marsh. Take it easy."

He saw them halt beside the safe and examine the ground, then circle out and back to the waiting car. Meantime, Piute Joe was plodding forward steadily, being as yet two hundred yards distant, and evincing no token of curiosity in the group awaiting him.

"Here's the point, Marsh," said Weld, as he and Dundas came back to the car. "Some time last night, or early this morning, the store was broken into and robbed, the safe being carried off. Sanders

must have heard the robbers, for he broke in on them and seems to have put up something of a fight before —they murdered him."

"Good God!" cried Marsh, catching the surgeon's arm. "Poor old Sanders murdered—no, you're joking!"

"It's true, Marsh," and in the eyes of Weld was something that smote Marsh cold within his soul. "Poor Sanders was brained. You remember the man Valdez whom you fired? He's been hanging around Mormon Valley for the last few days; and this morning we found that he had disappeared. Dundas pitched in with us in fine shape, and when we discovered automobile tracks outside the camp, we knew how the murderers had escaped. We simply followed the tracks—to this point."

"Then Newgate was in on it!" exclaimed Marsh. Vision-like, there flashed across his mind all that these words portended. "After Newgate laid me out, he went on to camp and——"

"Be careful what you say," broke in Dundas coldly. "It may be used against you."

Marsh stared into the glittering icy eyes of the man for an uncomprehending minute.

"Me?" he said slowly. "Used against me?" A short laugh broke from him. "I imagine you would be tickled to death to fasten this crime on me, Dundas—but you can't do it. I've been lying here all night."

"Now listen to me, Marsh." Dundas leaned over the side of the car, his powerful features set in a cold, deadly poise. "Do you admit that you were at Ilipah yesterday?"

"Of course, you ass!"

"Well, clutched in the dead hand of Sanders was found a list of supplies, in your own writing, bearing the date of yesterday, and headed 'Ilipah Orders.'"

Marsh stared blankly. He had kept a duplicate

list of the orders given the Ilipah mayor—but his pockets were now empty.

"But—see here! You can't suspect that I had any hand in this crime! Good heavens, men—you *can't!* Don't you see what really happened? Newgate went on to the camp and got Valdez; they broke into the store——"

"And left this safe lying here beside you?" broke in Dundas coldly. "It's no use at all, Marsh. The whole thing is plain! By these tracks," and he swept a hand toward the tyre-bitten sands, "your car went to Ilipah yesterday, came back, and then went a third time toward Ilipah.

"The evidence is damning, Marsh," went on Dundas icily. "You can't possibly lie out of it. You patched up things with Newgate and came on to camp with him; you looted the store and carried off the safe. Sanders got in a couple of cracks on you before he was murdered. When you got back here, you opened the safe for the other two crooks—then Newgate ditched you and the useless safe, and fled with Valdez."

"You're a damned liar!" flared out Marsh. "I got the goods on *you* yesterday—and now you've framed this up on me, damn you! I caught Newgate at the Ilipah post office, with a letter from you in his pocket. Your whole game's exposed!"

"Where's Levy?" cut in Dundas, unheeding the accusation. "Was he in on the deal?"

"Levy's on business which is no concern of yours. Weld, can't you see——"

The surgeon shook his head, pity in his eyes.

"I can't see anything but the plain facts, Marsh," he returned gravely. "I'm frightfully sorry, but——"

Marsh raised himself, fury surging through him.

"This is your doing, you dog!" he cried, making an ineffectual attempt to strike at the sneering face of Dundas. "Newgate came to you last night—

told you the game was up—and between you this damnable thing was framed on me! I forced the whole thing out of Newgate; how you'd had him drug me, and then tried to ruin me by claiming I was drunk—how you are the real man behind this booze and deviltry!"

"I'm sorry," said Dundas, quietly, turning away. The drab figure of Piute Joe had approached, and the desert rat was standing watching and listening. "Here, you! Were you over at Ilipah yesterday?"

The tone, rather than the words themselves, brought a flash into the faded eye, and the prospector's wrinkled features hardened in a scowl.

"You yerself!" he retorted. "My name's Piute Casey. What the hell is it to you?"

Dundas laughed in understanding.

"Didn't mean to rile you, old-timer," he returned soothingly. "There's been a murder at Mormon Valley and we're after the men. They had a car like this, and seem to have headed for Ilipah, early this morning. Did you meet any one on the way as you came from there?"

Piute Joe reflected, his weatherwise gaze dwelling on Marsh and Weld.

"Nope," he answered at length. "I ain't seen no automobyle on the road to-day, gents. But about three mile back toward Ilipah, they's tracks where one turned off'n the road."

"Oh! Which way?" demanded Weld eagerly.

"West. Toward the desert."

Dundas nodded, and motioned to the car.

"Here, you climb in, Piute Joe. We'll want you as a witness."

"Huh?" The prospector stared at him. "Who in hell ye talkin' to? What about them burros o' mine—goin' to order them to climb in, too?"

Dundas took a step toward him with angry eyes.

"Forget your burros! They'll wander back to town all right. Get into this car, d'you hear? We want your testimony."

"Wait till ye get it, ye cat-headed mule driver!" The right hand of Piute Joe slipped inside the belt of his trousers and slid out with a revolver in its grip. "Consarn yer blasted face! Tell me to leave them ol' burros o' mine out here, will ye? Why, ye rotten strip of a bum banana, who ye think's runnin' this here desert? *You?* I ain't gettin' tangled up in no lawsuits—no, by jings! Hop inter that automobyle and *shove!* Hurry up, blame the lot of ye!"

Dundas took another step forward, his fists clenched—and the desert rat fired, the bullet making Dundas duck hastily.

"Shove, I'm tellin' ye!" growled the old prospector.

Silently shrugging his shoulders, but with venom in his face, Dundas turned and cranked the car, then climbed in beside Weld. The flivver sped away toward Mormon Valley, leaving Piute Joe master of the field.

"As soon as we get Marsh home," Weld was speaking in the ear of Dundas, but Marsh caught the bitter words, "we'd better bring a couple of men back here and follow those tracks where they turn off. We're sure to get the other scoundrels that way."

Marsh knew now what had happened, for in his own mind the fragments pieced together perfectly. Newgate had gone direct to Mormon Valley, had found Dundas and had told everything. Desperate, Dundas had made a quick, bold stroke to seize advantage of Marsh's condition. He had sent Newgate and Valdez to raid the store—and during the raid, poor Sanders had been aroused and murdered. Then Newgate, fleeing in the car, had returned to

Marsh and had carefully left the office safe on the sand near by.

He saw guilt fastened upon him, guilt that could be denied, but not disproved. The circumstances would convict him, as circumstances have convicted many another good man! How could he combat this devilish thing? His own charges against Dundas were futile without proof—and Dundas well knew their futility! But there was one thing which neither Newgate nor Dundas could know, unless some chance had revealed it to them—the hiding place of the letter taken from Newgate, the letter which would incriminate Dundas.

"That's why Dundas was so quick to search me—he was looking for it!" thought Marsh.

They were nearly within sight of the camp, when one of the rear tyres blew out—too heavily charged with air to withstand the desert heat. Weld jumped out with the jack, and vanished in the rear; instead of following at once, Dundas twisted about in his seat and transfixed Marsh with his coldly glittering eyes.

"Marsh," he said, his voice low but tensed, "I'll get you out of this scrape if you'll return me that letter you took from Newgate."

For a moment the astounding offer took Marsh off his feet.

"That letter's where you'll never find it!" he returned. The brows of Dundas lifted.

"So? Don't try to bluff, young man! Do you accept my offer?"

"You go to hell!" snapped Marsh. "That letter will break you yet!"

Dundas merely laughed, and swung out of the car to help with the tyre.

Marsh could but dimly remember the arrival at camp. Presently, however, he was in full command of himself again, due in part to a most unpleasant

swallow of medicine which Weld administered to him. He did realize, however, that Elsa Hammond appeared to have taken over the authority of the place, and he resented it.

What he did not realize was that Dundas very cleverly contrived to further this appearance by coolly ignoring all others and directing his report to Elsa Hammond alone; and that, Kelly not venturing to assert himself, the girl's natural poise and inherent ability led her to assume a leadership that was thus thrust upon her.

Dan Kelly, Crowther, and Randall stood a little apart. Elsa Hammond and Virginia Stevenson stood by the doorway, listening to the damning evidence set forth by Dundas. The most unconcerned person of all present appeared to be John Marsh himself. He drew his office chair to the doorway and sat down, took out his pipe and tobacco and proceeded to smoke.

"I believe that concludes the case, doctor?" Dundas glanced at Weld, who nodded regretful assent. "Of course, on our own account we can do nothing save hold Marsh; Weld and I sent a man to Pahrock last night, Miss Hammond, to summon the Las Vegas sheriff—who has jurisdiction here."

"Thank you." Elsa Hammond turned to Marsh, her hazel eyes troubled. "Is this almost incomprehensible report correct?"

"The report is entirely correct, Miss Hammond," he returned coolly, "as far as it goes."

The girl's lips tightened. Plainly, she had no love for the responsibility which had been put upon her shoulders, and she could not understand the laconic reply of Marsh.

"Where were you yesterday and last night, if I may ask? And where is Mr. Levy? Why on earth don't you *say* something?"

"And intrude on the remarks of Mr. Dundas?

Not at all!" returned Marsh lightly. "Since I am now given the floor, I went yesterday to Ilipah with Levy, who there took the train farther on—bound on business of the company, which he will disclose to you upon his return here. Shortly afterward, I encountered Colonel Newgate, who was in Ilipah under the name of Nickerson. And under that name, he was receiving mail from Mr. Dundas, here."

Marsh paused.

"That is a lie," said Dundas evenly. "Where is your proof?"

Marsh disregarded this query, and continued to address Elsa Hammond.

"From a letter written and signed by Mr. Dundas," he went on calmly, "which Newgate had just received, I found proof of what we had long suspected—that Dundas was the real owner and founder of Mormon Valley, and that he had used Newgate as a blind to hide his activities. Having taken Newgate into custody, I started home with him. I halted to light the car lights, he threw in the spark, and when I cranked up——" He displayed his bruised arm, and finished his short tale.

He saw Weld studying him in frowning perplexity; he saw Kelly and the two surveyors grinning; Miss Stevenson was frankly bewildered, while Elsa Hammond looked from him to Dundas with intent, concentrated gaze.

"Where are your proofs of these charges, Mr. Marsh?" she asked at length.

"As for my proceedings at Ilipah," returned Marsh, "I fancy that Piute Joe Casey or any one else who was there will verify them."

"Casey?" Miss Hammond frowned at the name, but Marsh saw Crowther and Randall exchange a swift look. Evidently, he thought, they knew the man. A moment later, when the meeting with the

old prospector had been explained, Crowther quietly left the group, unnoticed.

"It is not your proceedings at Ilipah which are in question, Mr. Marsh," said the girl quietly, when Casey's mention had been cleared up. "It is what you did after leaving Ilipah—during last night! Your charges against Mr. Dundas——"

"Include the fact, to which Newgate confessed," put in Marsh, "that he had drugged me the night I was in Mormon Valley—drugged me at the instigation of Dundas, here, and fetched me home as he did in order to ruin me."

"Be careful, young man!" Dundas stepped forth with a growl of anger. "What you are saying amounts to criminal libel!"

"Stop a moment, please!" interrupted Elsa Hammond, white-faced. "Mr. Marsh, where is that letter you say you got from Newgate? Where are your proofs of your charges?"

Marsh rose, smiling.

"This is not a court of law, Miss Hammond. I shall produce my proofs when I am ready—and not before. Dan!" Marsh beckoned Kelly forward. "Much as I would relish the prospect, I am at the present moment unable to enter into a physical encounter with Dundas. Kindly escort him back to his own camp—and keep him there."

Dundas stepped forward, his face black with anger—but Elsa Hammond was before him.

"Mr. Dundas is here at my request, as my guest, sir!" she exclaimed, facing Marsh hotly. Her hazel eyes blazed at him. "Kindly remember your present position."

"My present position is that of boss of this camp, Miss Hammond!" interrupted Marsh curtly, his voice clashing like steel. "Kindly remember that you are my guest, and not my employer! Kelly, why are you waiting?"

Before Miss Hammond could say more, Dundas nodded to Kelly, and addressed the girl in accents of grave pity.

"Don't infuriate him, Miss Hammond, I beg of you! He's desperate, of course, and is merely trying to put a bold face on the matter and stave off the inevitable. I'll go, for the present, and relieve the situation. Weld, by all means take my car to follow the tracks of Valdez and Newgate."

And with this he departed. The two girls turned abruptly and went to their own cottage.

Weld beckoned to some of the men who were watching the scene from below, and a moment later the grinding whir of the automobile's engine filled the basin.

Left alone with Marsh, Randall slowly came to the doorway.

"Want me to fix up that head a bit, Mr. Marsh?" he proffered awkwardly.

"No, thanks." Marsh looked at him, with a smile. "You and Crowther know Piute Joe Casey, do you? His name seemed to wake you up."

"Yes, sir." The man's eyes warmed a trifle. "We've known him off and on a good many years. I guess Crowther went to meet him."

Marsh nodded comprehension and glanced away toward the opposite side of the basin.

"Poor Sanders!"

Randall nodded, distress in his eyes.

"I know, Mr. Marsh. If—if there's anything I could do to help——"

"Thanks. Nothing but keep the work moving along, Randall! Levy ought to be back in two or three days and he'll be able to push her through if —if I'm gone."

Randall turned away, cursing under his breath.

For a space Marsh sat motionless, staring vacantly across at the desert hills, but seeing nothing of what

was before him. He was suddenly lost in a mood of listless despondency. With the sheriff and coroner would come the end of the bootless struggle. After that, evidence was all that would count.

"Eh?" Marsh glanced up as some one addressed him. He wakened from his reverie to see Dan Kelly standing beside him, watching his face with anxious gaze. "Oh, it's you? Dundas went home, did he?"

"Yes, sir." Kelly paused, then broke forth impulsively. "Aw, hell, boss! Will ye, now, let me an' some of the byes take a run through shanty-town? We'd be proud to lay out that divil Dundas aside o' poor Sanders."

"It's no use, Dan." Marsh smiled wearily. "They've got me this time for keeps."

"Eh? Divil take me! Didn't I just hear you tellin' the dhirty divil to his face you'd been an' got the goods on him?"

"But I haven't, Dan. I had the evidence last night—and now it's gone. They've framed me, and done the job well!"

"Well," gasped Kelly disgustedly, "I'll be domned! If I'd knowed this, I'd have put me fist into that divil afore I left him—I would that!"

Marsh smiled.

"You put your fist into keeping these Mexicans on the job, Dan."

He forced himself resolutely to take up the threads of "the job." An hour later he was hard at work below the great dam, on which Kelly was superintending the men. He set Randall to work getting out the crews and supplies for turning out the cement blocks and the irrigation pipe, which would occasion a subcamp being established around the shoulder of the hill to the right of the dam.

After Randall had departed, and while Marsh was poring over the plans of the spillways and chutes, he

heard a light step behind him—and turned to see Miss Hammond approaching.

For a moment her gaze, grave and deeply questioning, met his ; then she spoke softly.

"Mr. Marsh, I've been trying to look at things through your eyes."

Too amazed to speak, Marsh could only stare at her dumbly, color flooding his cheeks.

"I was angry," she went on, meeting his eyes bravely, "and I said more than I ought! I am sorry, Mr. Marsh. Do you realize that you said more this morning about—about yourself than you have said heretofore ? You have thought us quick to judge, and you have resented it and held silence."

"I tried once to explain about that night over at Mormon Valley," said Marsh slowly.

"And I've wanted to discuss it very often since then," she frankly confessed, her level eyes strangely luminous and compelling. "And this morning, I had not usurped your authority from any ill will toward you, nor had we prejudged you. But it was a shock to find—what was told us! Your exposure of Ralph Dundas left us all thunderstruck."

"Yes. Dundas is your friend," said Marsh gravely.

"No more than you were my friend. And I want to believe in you, if you will let me."

Marsh whitened as he met her quiet, compellent eyes ; whitened at thought of what was coming, of what must come! He realized that Elsa Hammond was meeting him frankly, fairly, openly, and was setting forth her very soul without reserve, striving to wipe away the misunderstandings of the past.

It was a moment for soul nakedness. With a boldness which Marsh had not thought dwelt within him,

he had stripped away conventions and spoke what was in his mind.

"I have not realized all this, Miss Hammond. Dundas has been a friend, perhaps more than a friend, of yours, for a long time. I think he cares a great deal for you. He has carried your picture for years. I have thought—it has seemed to me that he was in a position where his word would carry far more weight with you than would mine."

"I have never given you reason to think such things," she responded gravely, crimson flooding into her cheeks. "But Ralph has given plain evidence that backs up his word."

"I have never had more than my word to offer," said Marsh dully.

"But you have it now!" cried the girl, her eyes brimming with eagerness. "Don't you see? That letter, of which you spoke, proves everything!"

"I haven't it." Marsh's gray eyes blazed from his white face. "Dundas does not know where it is, and he is afraid! If it is found, as I think it will be—or if Newgate is found——"

"What? You have nothing?"

"Nothing more than my word. It will have to balance all the evidence on earth, Miss Hammond!"

"I—want to believe in you—yet—yet how can I?" Like a wail the words broke from her throat. "Can't you give me—more than——"

He looked into her eyes, shaken by the emotions that gripped him, sundered by the strong impulse to take her at her word—to claim the faith and the love which he read in her eyes! Yet he dared not speak, and before the twisted anguish of his face she turned suddenly and left him standing there; and he did not know that tears were on her cheeks.

After a time Marsh found Dan Kelly shaking him angrily.

"Divil an' all take you! Standin' here in the sun

with no hat an' the hurt head of ye—and the bleakness of hell gazin' out of your two eyes! Man, dear, will ye sit down?"

Marsh sank back on his camp stool apathetically.

"Dom the women!" said Kelly, entirely to himself.

VI

DESERT FLIGHT

DURING the afternoon Marsh plunged into the work in hand with a savage energy that banished personal thoughts. His hopes hung now upon the return of Weld with the camp car, and that which lay within the pocket of the car—provided it had not been located.

Supper over, he sat down to the typewriter and pounded out his report to the company concerning the murder and robbery, then wrote out in detail his plans regarding the new town of Hammond, together with the arrangements made at Ilipah; this latter was for Levy's benefit, Marsh reflecting that before his assistant returned he would probably be in the Las Vegas jail awaiting trial.

Barely had he finished this task and lighted his pipe, when the office door opened to admit Doctor Weld. Marsh leaped to his feet.

"So you're back! Did you find the car? Did you fetch it home?"

"The car?" Weld gazed at him in weary curiosity. "No. I've been hunting men, not cars. We traced that car east, then north—straight across the railroad and highway the other side of Ilipah, and onto the Painted Skull Range. There we lost her. It's gravel and stone canyon country—the worst I ever saw!"

"And you lost her!" repeated Marsh dully. "Did you stop at Ilipah?"

"Yes, with no result except to confirm your story

about capturing Newgate. However, I wired up and down the railroad to every town on the line, and if Newgate or his companion turn up they'll be certain to be caught. Well, I'm off to get a bit of supper. See you later."

So Newgate had struck across the railroad to the east, into the fantastic maze of desert where his tracks had been lost! Why? The answer was obvious and kindled an eager flame within Marsh.

The criminals must know that they could not hope to come out of the desert with that car—therefore they had struck on into the Painted Skull Range, intending to abandon the car and presumably scatter.

Marsh had heard tales of that range of weird desert formations; waterless and unknown, even prospectors shunned it as a place accursed, for nothing of value had ever been found there and its formations were crazy. Newgate, however, had evidently been making for some definite point.

"By George, I'd like to go after him!" thought Marsh. "But——"

It was a large "but." There was no bail for a murder charge, and the sheriff could not now be many more hours in coming.

Dundas, perhaps, had a better idea than any one else of where the flivver might be. And if Dundas ever got wind that his letter still reposed on that car—no one else would reach it first!

"I don't dare tip any one else off about it," reflected Marsh, biting hard at his pipestem. "He'd get wise to it—the infernal scoundrel! I'll have to wait till Levy shows up. And what good would that letter do, after all, so far as this murder charge is concerned? None whatever. It'd go a whole lot toward proving my story, however. H'm! Where did Newgate get his supplies?"

He swung around to his desk and got out his large county maps. Newgate and his accomplice—for

Marsh did not doubt that Valdez had abetted him—had struck off into the Painted Skull Range where the map showed not so much as the mark of a water hole.

Before committing the crime, they must have filled the car with gasoline, and taken aboard water and provisions—from Mormon Valley. They would need extra gasoline, too, if they were to get far across the desert sands. Were that car found, even after being abandoned, the containers of the gas and water would be damning witnesses against Dundas—for they must have come from Mormon Valley, and could be identified.

"Dundas is a slick devil—he schemed out this whole affair almost on the spur of the moment; but right there's a detail he must have overlooked!" thought Marsh, his gray eyes alight. "That old flivver *must* be found! If I could only have a week's respite! Well, no use sighing."

At this point in his reflections, the office door was thrown open, and Dan Kelly hastily entered. Behind him came Crowther and Randall.

"Hello, boys!" Marsh smiled. "Where in thunder have you three fellows been?"

"We've been talking to old man Casey." Randall glanced at Crowther, then back to Marsh. "He's outside camp, over on the sand hills."

"Wouldn't he come in?" queried Marsh.

"No—he's afraid he'll be dragged into the law's clutches as a witness," and Randall smiled faintly. "While we've been confabbing with him, Kelly's been over at Mormon Valley."

Marsh shifted his gaze to the big foreman. He was suddenly aware that all three men were in the grip of a repressed excitement, and the smile died from his eyes.

"So? What's up, boys? You haven't found Newgate, by any chance?"

"No such luck, boss," returned Kelly. "I run

over to be keepin' me eye on Dundas, an' just now the sheriff come in. Dundas, the slick divil, did meet him and is talkin' with him this minute!"

The sheriff—at last! Despite his knowledge of innocence, Marsh whitened, and felt as though a cold hand had touched his soul.

"Well, I'd better pack up some clean clothes, then," said Marsh soberly, rising from his chair. "I'll need 'em."

"Hold on, boss," exclaimed Kelly, shaking his red thatch. "You ain't goin' with the sheriff. But do you go on, Randall! I'm done with talkin'."

Randall cleared his throat nervously.

"Why, Mr. Marsh," he spoke out, "I been talkin' with Piute Joe and so has Crowther. Seems like the old chap has taken quite a shine to you and got all riled up by Dundas this mornin'."

"He certainly did." Marsh smiled faintly, remembering that scene on the desert. "I'm sorry you couldn't induce him to accept our hospitality here."

"We was inducing him to do something else," returned Randall. "Now, Mr. Marsh, you can trust old man Casey to the last chip! We told him the whole story, and he was all for going over to Mormon Valley, pickin' a quarrel with Dundas, and shooting. But we stopped that, 'cause we had a better scheme on foot."

Marsh lifted his brows, surprised.

"Oh, you had! What is this scheme?"

"Why, sir, we have it doped out that if a bit o' time is gained, so much the better for all concerned; that is, it ain't goin' to do you no particular good to get rushed off to jail an' let Dundas shove the deal through. No, sir! So what's to hinder you goin' off there to join old Piute Joe right this minute? He'll take you where no sheriff on earth can find you."

Marsh lifted a protesting hand.

"Thanks, boys," he said quietly. "But I don't want to run away from this thing. Don't you see, you chaps, that if I were to skip out, the action would amount to a confession of guilt?"

Kelly stepped forward, nodding.

"We figgered you'd be sayin' that, boss, but me an' the byes ain't done. Now tell me here! We want to get our hands on Colonel Newgate, blast him! Him or Valdez. We heard that Doc Weld come home after havin' lost the car over beyant the railroad in the Painted Skull Hills; well, Newgate ain't got very far, boss! I'm thinkin' meself that he's hidin' out in some o' the mining towns like he was over to Ilipah—up in Bullfrog, mebbe, or Chloride, or somewheres off the railroad.

"Well, it's goin' to take time, but all three of us knows this here country, boss—we know all the byes betwixt Las Vegas an' Rhyolite, in all the camps. 'Twill be a hard thing, but we can write an' set them byes to work diggin' up Newgate or Valdez! D'ye see, now? Two weeks, mebbe, would help."

Marsh mechanically knocked out his dead pipe and filled it again. Sudden eagerness blazed in his eyes.

"See here, men!" he broke out, new vigor in his tone. "Would this old chap Casey take me wherever I wanted to go? I'll be glad to pay for his services."

"He don't want pay," put in Crowther almost harshly. "Yes, I reckon he'll take you in any direction you want, sir."

"Here's what I'm driving at," went on Marsh with increasing animation. "If I can locate that camp automobile which Newgate stole, I can very probably get my hands on the evidence which will convict Dundas—convict him of being an accessory after the fact to the shooting of Mr. Levy, and of conspiring with Newgate! Not only this, but if I can find that car I'll run even chances of proving that Dundas stood behind Newgate in the murder

and robbery! And that car is somewhere in the Painted Skull Range—d'you see?"

From all three men broke a low exclamation.

"Divil an' all, but it's fine head on ye, boss!" cried Kelly admiringly. "So while we're on the trail o' Newgate, it's you an' Casey who'll be chasin' that ould car, eh? And one way or the other we'll not lose!"

"Yes." Marsh nodded, and flung to the winds his scruples. After all, the game was well worth the candle! Piute Joe Casey probably knew the Painted Range as well as any one; and two weeks would be enough, more than enough time!

"But I'll not run away from the sheriff," added Marsh. The three stared at him in bewilderment, while he laughed curtly. "No—I'll just take two weeks off! I'll go off with Piute Joe and lose myself; at the end of two weeks I'll come and give myself up, and I'll either win or lose in that time—it's a gamble, my friends! Shall we try it?"

"Aye!" cried Randall. "And we'll do our part, Mr. Marsh!"

Marsh turned quickly to his desk and sat down. He seized pen and paper and addressed a brief note to Elsa Hammond:

"I am going away in search of the evidence for which you asked me this afternoon. In two weeks from to-day, if I have not found this evidence, I shall give myself up to stand trial; it is a foregone conclusion that, in view of the evidence against me, the coroner's jury will find me guilty.

"Two weeks will make or break me. Please hand this note to the sheriff—he is square and will understand. I am not running away from consequences in any sense."

Signing the note, he took from his vest the deputy

sheriff's star and pinned it through the folded paper, which he then extended to Kelly.

"Here, Dan, give that to Miss Hammond to-night, will you—before the sheriff leaves? Now, how do you expect that I'll be able to escape from him? Hasn't he an auto here?"

Kelly nodded, as he stowed the paper in his pocket.

"Sure he has, but before sunup ould Casey will have ye where autos can't go, I'm thinkin'! And I'll guarantee to give the sheriff a bit o' blarney that'll hould him until ye get well away, boss."

"All right." Swiftly Marsh kicked off his slippers and began to get into his high-laced, heavy desert boots. Midway of the task, he glanced up. "Say, Dan! Do you suppose you could keep Dundas from using his car for a few days? While my absence for two weeks will be generally taken as an indication of guilt—something which I can't help—still, Dundas will *know* that I'm not guilty; he'll know, also, that I'm doing my level best to find Newgate, or evidence that will clear me, and he may take some measures that would give Newgate warning. If you could do something to his flivver which would keep him at home and off the desert entirely——"

Kelly grinned.

"I'll do it this blessed night while he's over here lookin' in on the inquest, boss!"

"Good! Here's a note for Mr. Levy when he comes back and a letter to the company which I wish you'd post yourself. Until Mr. Levy returns, remember that you're in charge of this camp and responsible for it. Keep Dundas off the company's land at all cost; he'll have to be at the inquest, but keep him off afterward.

"And you, men, I want to thank you for your trust in me! Please God, I'll justify it before I'm done!"

At the doorway the foreman left them, striding

off toward the store on the opposite side of the basin. Marsh glanced at the Hammond cottage—then turned to his two surveyors.

"All right, boys. Let's go find old man Casey!"

And in this fashion John Marsh abandoned his job—temporarily.

John Marsh was down to the bed rock of existence, and admitted it with a wry grin that twisted his cracked lips painfully.

"Two weeks from to-night," he had said to Piute Joe Casey, on setting forth from the scene of his labors into the desert, "I want to turn up at some town on the railroad. Will you guarantee it?"

"Yep," assented the desert rat laconically. "Let's go."

After that first forced night's march that only ended with daybreak, Marsh lost all count of time. The crossing of the railroad and rutted sand trail that marked the highway had become a dim memory, all but obliterated by the toil which had intervened since. Piute Joe said that they had only been "out" four days—but it had seemed more like four years.

Before that first night was done, Marsh had told Casey the whole story—of necessity. The old prospector frankly had no desire to go into the Painted Skull region; but he had acquiesced upon learning the reasons.

Once over the railroad they had picked up the tracks of Newgate's stolen car and had followed them until they were lost in the fine-blown sand of the gravel desert. Nor was it strange that Doctor Weld had failed to follow farther, for they had come into such a country as Marsh had imagined could lie only at the world's end.

The three burros plodded after the gaunt, drab figure of Piute Joe, their loads of water cans ever and anon sending forth muffled "plunk-plunks"

under the pressure, their sharp little hoofs never faltering. After them toiled Marsh, squinting against the desert glare.

Marsh had long ere this fondly imagined himself hardened to the desert. Here, however, was no shelter by day or night; here each ounce of water was husbanded like precious gold; here the constant toiling through surface sand brought into play muscles which he had never previously known to exist.

And the sun! Striding over that sand hour after hour was a different matter from superintending workmen back at camp. Nor was the sand the worst, for after getting into the Painted Skull Range the huge masses of rock refracted the scorching rays tenfold, until Marsh thought the very soul would be burned out of him.

"No wonder that even prospectors don't like this country!" exclaimed Marsh on the fourth night out, as they settled down for a smoke after supper. "It's got anything beaten I ever saw or heard of!"

Piute Joe chuckled to himself.

Marsh grinned back as well as his sun-cracked features would permit.

"Well, I'm not here on pleasure, so I'll stick a while longer. There's no water whatever ahead of us?"

"Well, I won't say they's *none*. They's marble cañons if ye can find 'em, which same allus has a few drops o' water. 'Bout this here automobyle, though, it's plumb hard to say. I kind o' figger that Newgate dropped that other guy at the railroad an' come on here alone. He wouldn't have enough supplies for both, for long, 'tain't likely."

Although taken by surprise, Marsh found himself agreeing with this theory, and before they stretched out for the night they had argued it into plausibility.

"Where Newgate's headin' for there ain't no tellin'," observed Casey judicially. "This here

deestrict is laid out like a crazy quilt in hell; they ain't no reg'lar run o' valleys nor nothin'. However, I seen some doves, so in the mornin' we'll get a p'inter on the nighest water, which'll likely be a marble cañon."

"Then he might be heading clear through to the Pahranagat?" queried Marsh in dismay. "Could he make it without more gasoline? He couldn't carry much of a supply."

"He could carry enough, an' he could make it—only he won't," was the dry response. "He prob'ly knows this here layout pretty well, but this here ol' desert has tricks up her sleeve. Wait till mornin', and I'll show you something."

When Marsh wakened at daybreak, his companion had vanished. He set about making ready their breakfast, and before it was quite prepared, Casey showed up.

"Jest what I thought," exclaimed the old prospector complacently. "I been watchin' the doves, an' they're headin' due east. Mebbe we can light on a marble cañon an' fill a water can."

This prospect looked interesting. Newgate was a desert-wise man, and if there were any water in these desolate hills he would know of it. After the murder of Sanders, which, of course, had not been premeditated, it was not difficult to see that Newgate and his comrades had taken to desperate flight.

"The murder happened to fit in with their plans, that was all," thought Marsh, as he took up the trail again behind the burros. "Dundas planned a robbery—and cirumstances combined to further his infernal schemes! Well, it looks to me as if I'm down to the very bottom of things at last! If I could have had a glimpse at this country about the time I bought that six-dollar kakemono by Chang Mow, I'd have been apt to stay in New York!"

The valleys were now sandy arroyos, now rifts in

solid rock, now twisting cañons that wound between walls of dazzling whiteness. They were heart-breaking, these valleys, even the canny old Casey admitting his desert prescience quite useless here; for as often as not they would end in a blank draw, forcing the travelers to retrace weary steps and seek some other opening, which in its turn might end in a box cañon, or peter out along some blazing red hillside. Here were no more of the gaunt, ghostly joshua trees, but patches of mesquite and other desert brush occurred at intervals.

Presently, as they wound through a wide sandy stretch, Piute Joe came to a halt. The cessation wakened Marsh from the half stupor in which he had been moving, and he passed the mules hastily, to find Casey lighting a pipe.

With his pipe he pointed to the sand ahead. There Marsh discerned two faint depressions running in parallel lines; his eyes remained blank, however.

"What's the idea?"

"Well," drawled the other, enjoying his bewilderment, "three-four days back I reckon them tracks was some plain to read, only the sand has sifted into 'em——"

"Tracks!" cried Marsh, starting. "You mean——"

"Yep, I guess we picked up that there galoot, Newgate."

Laughing excitedly, Marsh strode on in advance, staring at the tracks, certain at last that they had come upon the trail!

"Hold on, Marsh!" The voice of Casey restrained his eagerness. "Remember I'm an old man, and have a heart! What d'ye reckon them birds is after?"

Halting, Marsh stared up at the sky, and remembered that he had subconsciously noted the

birds ever since they had started that morning, but had not focussed his thoughts or attention upon them. A dozen vultures they were, hanging against the sky in wide circles. Two or three would sink down together from sight, only to rise again more hurriedly, as though frightened.

"Are they following—us?" queried Marsh, uneasiness in his upturned eyes. "They seem to be just about overhead, Joe."

"We ain't that dead yet, I takes it. Nope, they're after somethin' they ain't right certain is their meat yet. A sick antelope, mebbe, or a coyote. But about that there Newgate——"

He swept out his hand, indicating the scattered patches of bush.

"In a basin hotter'n hell like this one is," he said, sucking at his pipe, "which same ain't none too plentiful in this desert, that there bresh sure can raise cain with an automobyle! 'Tain't everybody that knows it, neither."

Marsh glanced at him in surprise.

"That brush? Why, nonsense, man, I've driven over miles of it!"

"You ain't rid over this *here* kind o' country, have ye?"

"No. But back around the camp I have——"

"Back there around the camp is a reg'lar polar circle compared to this layout, son! They's places like this off and on all acrost the desert, but this here one is enough to make the most ungodliest sinner born sit up an' take notice that they's more'n one hell!"

"It's hot, all right," assented Marsh. "But what about the brush?"

"I'm a-gettin' there. Every oncet in a while an automobyle she burns up, out on the desert, and no one knows what's done it, sabe? Well, we done got it figgered out, now, and most people that drives

them things reg'lar is wise to it. But I figger Newgate ain't! And it's that brush what does it."

"How?" Marsh frowned.

"Friction. The belly of an automobyle is right greasy, an' runs next the ground, sabe? Well, you take a basin or sink like this here partic'lar bit o' damnation, and let an automobyle go over that there bresh at a right smart clip—and you can stack my pile that somethin's due to happen most unpleasant!"

Marsh whistled in surprise.

"By George, I believe you're dead right about that, Joe! The friction would be mighty apt to generate a spark—and a spark would sure do the business! And do you really imagine that Newgate may get caught that way?"

"Wouldn't be a bit surprised, Marsh."

They advanced anew. By this time the morning was wearing well onward, and the sun was vertical—blazing down with an intensity that was almost overpowering, its terrific rays refracted tenfold by the surrounding hills.

"Hey, Marsh! Looks like our water ahead. Marble cañon, anyhow!"

"Thank Heaven!" breathed Marsh. "We'll stop an hour, Joe! Maybe we can find some shade."

Twenty minutes later they were between the gaunt, blazing white walls of a marble cañon that twisted and wound a sinuous course before them. That the doves had led them aright was obvious, for water was denoted by the increased growth of brush on the cañon floor. It would not be water as he had always known it, Marsh realized; it would be but a few trickling drops oozing from some vein of the stone walls, to be lost again instantly in the sand; yet it would be water, far sweeter than the fluid in the heat-blistered tins that rattled on the flanks of the burros!

Then, abruptly, with a harsh word that halted

the straining animals, Piute Joe turned in his tracks and waved a hand to Marsh.

"Come here! I reckon we struck it at last, pardner."

Thirty feet distant was a black patch of burned brush, and in the centre of this lay a twisted heap of metal which had once been an automobile! Nothing was left of the car but scrap iron; but it was plain that the flivver had struck a jagged rock concealed amid the brush, and had pitched over on its side—perhaps after the fire had started, perhaps starting the fire.

"Over yonder, against that left wall," said the old prospector, "lays Newgate. It's him the vultures was after! Guess I'll view the remains."

With the words, Casey started forward at an awkward run. Marsh, however, after one glance at the motionless figure made a black splotch in the sunlight, slumped down and sat dejectedly in the sand. Utter despair had come to him at last, suddenly and absolutely.

Newgate was dead. The letter from Dundas, which might have afforded him a fighting chance, was gone with the car; even from where he stood, Marsh could see that not a scrap of inflammable substance had survived that conflagration.

Even with this, had Newgate still lived, the man's testimony might have been procured. Now all final and ultimate hope was destroyed—at one blow Marsh had found the whole evidence wiped out, obliterated by a higher Hand, as though to purposely cast him into the very deeps of destruction!

"The galoot must ha' got pitched out o' the automobyle when she turned over." Marsh caught the voice of Casey, and looked up to see the old prospector approaching him again. "His right leg was busted."

"Did you search him?" A flash of hope revived

in the breast of Marsh. "He may have found that letter, or he may have other papers in his pockets! Now that he's dead, it is my one chance——"

The flicker of hope was blasted by Casey's shake of the head.

"Ain't a thing on him—seems like he got considerable scorched up 'fore he could crawl away from the blaze. And say—what d'ye think?" added the prospector indignantly. "The galoot had laid his face right square in the trickle of water we was after! Don't that beat all?"

Marsh made a hopeless gesture, and struggled to his feet.

"Let's go on back to the railroad," he said lifelessly.

"Not me. I'm goin' to stay here a while and enjoy the scenery." Casey grinned suddenly. "So are you, pardner! We got *work* ahead of us, believe me!"

VII

THE RETURN

ABE LEVY obtained what he went after in Carson City, though not without some delay. Returning by train to Ilipah, he heard a garbled account of what had happened, and hired a machine to take him out to camp at once.

He arrived there in a state of bewildered grief and anger, which settled into a poignant dismay when he had collated the various stories and had arrived at the truth of things. Unswerving as was his loyalty to his chief, boldly though he refused to admit the possibility of Marsh's guilt, he inwardly realized that the case against Marsh was deadly.

To make it worse, Marsh had been gone for a week, and there was a reward of five hundred dollars offered for information which would lead to his apprehension. The sheriff, it appeared, had been unconvinced that Marsh would give himself up within two weeks.

Levy arrived home in the morning, and it took him all the rest of that day to get the camp running smoothly again. Two bookkeepers and a storekeeper had arrived from Pahrock, and they had to be initiated into their work; Dan Kelly was having trouble with the dam spillways; Randall was having more trouble with the artificial stone molds around the shoulder of the hill where the new town of Hammond was to be built; the stage driver was in from Ilipah with a flivver to establish the stage line —and a thousand other details which had dropped slack-ended in the absence of both Marsh and Levy.

With the evening, a surprise awaited him. He was asked to the Hammond cottage to supper, and having scarcely seen the two girls since his arrival, accepted the invitation with alacrity.

He observed that Elsa Hammond was looking anything but her usual poised, authoritative self; and, as he sat chatting with her while Virginia Stevenson was finishing the chafing-dish preparations, she turned to him with a sudden direct gravity that startled him. Even before she spoke, he knew that he must "face the music," as he mentally termed it. Nor was he far astray.

"Mr. Levy," said the girl quietly, "I want to ask that you allow Mr. Dundas to come over here to-morrow—he is to take me riding."

Levy whitened a little, but chose his words carefully, revealing none of his anger.

"I am sorry you ask this, Miss Hammond, for Marsh left me very definite instructions on that point—and I must obey them. By the way, when do you expect your father?"

She looked down at her hands, biting her lip.

"I don't know. I had a letter yesterday—things have gone wrong again on the Colorado work. I don't think he has heard of the trouble here."

"You haven't written him?" ejaculated Levy in surprise.

"No. There was nothing I cared to write." She looked up at him again, her hazel eyes grave, unfathomable. "Mr. Dundas has brought over a very fine horse for me—part Arab. Surely you will not force me to walk over to the edge of the camp alone and back again."

"By no means!" exclaimed Levy. "We'll ride over on the horses that are here, Miss Hammond—and I'll return for you whenever you say. To-morrow afternoon?"

"At two." She laughed quickly. "And thank

you for the offer! Come, I think Virginia is all ready for us."

With the next morning Levy abruptly left Kelly a handful of men to work on the dam and flung the majority of his force around the shoulder of the hill to work upon the foundations for the buildings which were to comprise the nucleus of Hammond. The new road to this place, avoiding Mormon Valley by a mile, was to-day being used by the trucks for the first time. The drivers reported that the only bad place in this road was a hill just the other side of the California line, and Levy determined to inspect it that afternoon.

At noon arrived the stage on its first trip from Ilipah, but Levy was too busy to bother with it, and did not return from the new town site until two o'clock. Then, passing the office on his way to the Hammond cottage, he noticed a pile of mail on his desk and hastily shoved it into his pocket.

Riding west through the hills with Miss Hammond, he was thinking less about her than about the plight of Marsh. Nothing had been heard from Newgate, and from what he could learn about the Painted Skull region, Levy had no hope whatever that Marsh would come on any traces of the old camp flivver. In a few more days the two weeks would be gone, and then——

It was not pleasant to think of the courtroom, and Levy forced his thoughts away.

They found Dundas waiting on the old road, just over the company's line. He was mounted, and held the bridle of a second horse—a magnificent beast, showing his Arab blood in every line, nervous and high strung.

"What time shall I return for you?" he asked the girl, without heeding the cold nod that Dundas flung at him.

"About four, if you'll be so kind," she responded lifelessly.

Dundas aided her to dismount and to gain the saddle of the Arab. Then, as he handed the bridle of her former mount to Levy, he paused with his cold blue eyes on those of the engineer.

"I hear you've laid out a new road," he observed.

"Yes." Levy looked down at him without comment. Dundas flushed.

"Trying to kill the town of Mormon Valley, are you?" he answered sneeringly.

"We are," returned Levy. "And we will."

"One of these days," and taking a step closer, Dundas gazed up at him with cruelly glittering eyes, speaking in a voice that the girl could not hear, "one of these days, Levy, I'm coming over to your place and ride you into hell! I've got Marsh, and I'll get you!"

Then he turned away before the passion-swept Levy could respond, and swung up into his saddle. They rode westward into the hills, and Levy watched them away without moving.

Only when he was turning the horses toward camp did he remember his mail. Halting, he drew forth the envelopes and skimmed rapidly through them, and stopped at one that was addressed to him in a scrawling, unfamiliar hand, but which had by the postmark been sent that same morning from Ilipah.

Thinking this must be from the mayor, in regard to the supplies Marsh had ordered, he swiftly tore it open. Then he stared down at the note, his face whitening.

"Dear sir, I am riteing you at the reqwest of J. Marsh, him having took to bed from a touch of sun and no water to speak of resently.

"The sheriff has got him all O. K. or will have to-night when he gets here. Will fetch him over to

your plase in the morning. Am riteing this in a hurry to catch the stage and let you know we are well. Hopeing you are the same,

"Yours truly,

"J. CASEY.

P. S. Marsh says don't get no bass band out to meet him becawse he don't want no simpathy. J.C."

Slowly Levy put away the letter with his other and unregarded mail and urged the horses toward camp.

"So it's over at last—the sheriff's got him! And he's ill. *Dieu de Dieu!* Poor old Marsh, you must have had one hell of a time out there!" The passionate dark eyes of Levy suddenly flamed. "And, *diantre!* If they jail you, my friend, I myself shall seek out Dundas and send him to the hospital! I swear it!"

After which Gallic outbreak, Levy rode back to work ridden by a demon of grief and anger.

He rode out again, this time with Randall accompanying him, well before his appointed hour; for he had forgotten to inspect that hill, and it must be graded or the road changed without delay.

That grading was impossible, Levy saw at a glance upon reaching the place. From the valley below, the road went straight up a stiff grade—the only one on Randall's survey. As the two men stood on the hill, discussing the best detour, they caught the hoarse shrilling of a heavily loaded truck, and looked down the valley to see the last truck of the day on its way toward them from Pahrock. In front of the truck, however, and parting to either side of the road to allow it free passage, were Dundas and Miss Hammond.

As Dundas swung his horse from the road, he cursed under his breath—for the truck had come along at an inopportune moment. The scowl vanished from

his eyes as he rejoined the girl, however, and he leaned forward to catch her bridle; the Arab, naturally jumpy, had been frightened by the grinding whir of the truck.

"Thanks—I can handle him," returned Elsa Hammond. Side by side they walked their horses in the trail of the laden truck, and the eyes of the girl came up to meet the gaze of Dundas. "The answer, Ralph," she resumed quietly, "is—no."

The lean face of Dundas tightened, pale beneath its tan.

"No?" he repeated. "But, Elsa, in the old days——"

"In the old days," she said, "I had a girlish admiration for you, Ralph. It was not love. It has not been and is not love."

"That is final?" asked the man hoarsely.

"Yes."

They went on for a space in silence. The truck, up above them, had slowed in its advance, and despite the shriller grind of its gears, was forced to a halt. Dundas drew rein, as they saw the driver set his brakes and go to the radiator with a bag of water.

"Listen to me," he said curtly. "I've loved you for years, Elsa—and by Heaven, I'm not going to give you up! Is there any one else?"

"You have no right to ask that," she returned, her voice as cold as his gaze.

Dundas stared at her for a long moment, unmoving. Then a short laugh broke from him.

"Well! I have a proposition to make you, Elsa. Promise to marry me, and John Marsh shall go free; refuse, and he hangs for the murder of Sanders! Come, now. Which shall it be?"

The girl's face whitened, her eyes widened a little as they met his.

"Oh—you—you *beast!*" she said very slowly. "Then—what he said of you was true!"

"I admit nothing, my dear Elsa. But come! How much do you wish to save him? Enough to marry me?"

A moment she gazed at him, silent, motionless, save for her bosom that rose and fell to her excited breathing.

"Can you save him?" she asked at length.

"Yes." Exultation leaped into the face of Dundas.

"That is what I wanted to know," and the girl leaned forward, gazing at him in a hard contempt. "That is why I came with you to-day, Ralph—and I've found that you lied! You lied! And John told the truth of you! Oh, what a beast you are! Marry you? Get out of my sight!"

Her quirt lashed the flanks of her Arab, and he quivered and leaped away.

At that instant, from the truck on the hill fifty feet above, came a sudden snarling crunch of metal —overstrained, borne back by its weight of cement, the ratchet of its brake had ground off. With a scream of clashing gears, the insensate thing leaped backward down the slope.

That scream sent the Arab pitching in wild fear, and, echoing the scream with a faint cry that was lost in the roar of the plunging truck, Elsa Hammond reeled from the saddle, full in the path of the thing, and lay motionless!

The driver ran after his truck in futile pursuit, shouting. Levy and Randall leaped to their saddles, but, from their position on the hill, were helpless. Not so Dundas, however.

Flinging himself from his horse's back, Dundas hesitated for the fraction of an instant, as though weighing his chances—then darted forward. With the roaring truck a scant twenty feet above, he reached the motionless form of the girl, and, scooping her from the sand in his arms lifted her body above his head.

To the horror-stricken Levy, spurring madly down the hill, it seemed that the mad truck smashed into them both. But from the rolling cloud of dust he saw the body of Elsa Hammond thrown out to the sand, away from the danger track; and as the truck plunged on downward, the dim shape of Dundas lay broken in the dust.

"Thank the good God she has fainted!" sobbed Levy, as he swung to earth.

An hour later, Dundas, perfectly conscious, lay on a bed in the Hammond cottage and read the verdict in the eyes of Doctor Weld. Behind Weld stood Levy, Randall, and Kelly. The two girls were in the adjoining room.

The shadow of his thin smile curved the lips of Dundas.

"How long?" he whispered faintly. Weld, for all his iron nerve, could not repress the quiver of his lip.

. . . . . .

Later.

The office of the sheriff held a gloomy, almost tragic, atmosphere. The sheriff, standing behind John Marsh, was looking down at his boots and Levy, with haggard face, looked away out of the window.

"Look here, sheriff," Levy jerked at length, "can't we bail Marsh out? Dundas died without confessing. He's gone to a coward's grave, I believe he would have spoken if he'd lived to the day, but he died with sealed lips. Look here, sheriff," he almost shouted, "we've got to bail Marsh out."

The sheriff fingered his frayed moustache.

"Nope, I reckon not," he answered slowly. "Miss Hammond, she done spoke about it—but it can't be done, none whatever. Say, though, this here Dundas went out like a man—eh?"

Levy turned on him angrily, stung by this callous unconcern.

"See here, sheriff! Marsh has given himself up voluntarily—and I'm hanged if you're going to cart him away to jail! Confound you——"

"Be quiet, Abe!" commanded Marsh sharply. He turned to the officer. "Sheriff, may I have a moment in private with Miss Hammond?"

The sheriff surveyed him with a twinkle.

"Well, I reckon you can't escape here, Marsh—s'pose you take five minutes, 'fore we put them handcuffs back on you."

Marsh turned away with Elsa Hammond, repressing a smile. But Levy, at these words, flamed up in hot anger.

"Handcuffs—for him?" he stormed, shaking his fist under the sheriff's nose. "You try it! *Sang de Dieu!* Try it if you dare!"

He paused in astonishment, for the sheriff was laughing openly, and Piute Joe, in the car, was stifling a guffaw. Marsh and Elsa Hammond had walked to a little distance, and as Levy stared around, he saw the girl suddenly break into mingled tears and laughter, and the arm of Marsh clasp about her shoulders.

"You can't bail Marsh out—because he ain't a prisoner!" chuckled the sheriff.

"Not—a prisoner!" Levy stared anew. "But—you said in that note, Casey——"

Piute Joe leaned down from the car, grinning widely.

"What I said was to the p'int, Levy, but we didn't want to give Dundas no warnin', sabe? We found that galoot Newgate an' thought he was dead, but he ain't dead at all. So we got him out o' the desert, and had one hell of a time—he's layin' over at Ilipah right now! Yep. He's done confessed the whole blamed shootin' match, lock, stock an' barrel! We come over intendin' to take Dundas by s'prise—Valdez was took in Las Vegas last night."

Levy understood at last, and with a storm of happy

French oaths turned to rush toward Marsh—but the sheriff caught his arm and whirled him around.

"Son," said the officer severely, "nobody ain't in no hurry but you! Are you?"

Levy's jaw dropped. Raising one hand dazedly to his brow, he turned toward the horses and Virginia Stevenson.

The sheriff was quite correct—no one was in a hurry. Marsh and Elsa Hammond, in fact, had quite forgotten that any one else existed.

"Dear girl," Marsh was saying softly, "I've loved you from that first day I met you, in New York! I've never dared to tell you, even when I saw in your eyes——"

"Why didn't you tell me that day in camp—before you left?" She looked up into his eyes, smiling. "Didn't you know I wanted you to tell me then? Didn't you know that if you'd told me I'd have believed you against all the world, in spite of everything—because I love you, too? Why didn't you tell me then that you loved me?"

"Tell you then—when I was facing jail?" Marsh laughed a little. "Oh, dear heart, was that what you wanted me to do? It was very hard to keep silent! But listen, dearest! Do you know what I want your father to give us? That is, if he'll be in any mood to do it."

Her eyes gleamed like stars, with a great happiness.

"Dear, dad will give us whatever I tell him to!" Her laugh rippled forth happily. "He'll be so astonished that there——"

"Then ask him to give us that kakemono of the Chang Mow syce and the traveling horse!" Marsh chuckled. "We'll frame it, and when I've told you the real story about it——"

Back in the car, Piute Joe Casey stretched out comfortably and asked the sheriff for a match.

"Don't it beat all what folks find to talk about?" he mused reflectively. "Sheriff, reckon ye'd better light up—ain't goin' to be no vittles for us till night, at this rate. Look over yonder at Levy and the gal on the horse! Durned if they ain't goin' to git all flustered and excited likewise, right here in public! Don't it beat all?"

"Lay over there and give me some room!" ordered the sheriff, climbing in. "You dad-burned old hardshell, ain't you willin' to wait here all day if necessary?"

Piute Joe yawned.

"Oh, they ain't no hurry, I reckon!"

They grinned at each other understandingly.

THE BUILDER OF CHURCHES

THE BUILDER OF CHURCHES

A MORNING gloriously fine, the best that even that splendid stretch that lies between Gibraltar and the Florida Keys had to offer to those fortunate enough to find themselves afloat on its calm bosom. Golden-red feathers of cloud floated lazily across a sky of deepest blue. A gentle breeze tempered the rays of the climbing sun, rippling the face of the water where it was clear of the yellow weed.

The *Ramadan* was old as ships go, for ships age quickly. The Cinderella of a line of which she had been the pioneer, and once the pride, she had survived the perils of the deep until she had reached that anxious age when surveys become frequent and surveyors increasingly troublesome. To escape their argus eyes, a long time-charter had been found for her—Barcelona to the Mexican Gulf with Cardona salt, and back again to the Mediterranean with timber and cotton.

With her graceful lines, single funnel, and long tapering masts, the old ship held a beauty that the squat tramps among whom her declining years were spent, too sadly lacked. A long white-painted turtle-deck ran from her stern to the deep well forward of the foremast; showing an unbroken run, save for the engine room skylight and fiddley, and the white

house that formed the smoke room and cabin entrance under the bridge. Saloon, crew's quarters, all were placed below the deck, a plan that made for snugness in wintry weather, but made everything stuffy beyond words in the tropics.

She was cutting the curve of the thirtieth degree of northern latitude, and the fortieth of western longitude—the northern edge of the sluggish Saragossa Sea—thrusting along as massed iron plate and curved iron rib always does, without song or sound, when the people of Florida gave fervent thanks for the departure of the eating blizzard that had devastated their land ere roaring its way into the wide Atlantic.

It swept the deckload off a Swedish tramp, slapping the heavy deals into the water half a mile away; foundered a hard-working little rum-runner off the Virginia Capes; thrust a negro-manned Nassau schooner under, and stripped the thatch off a thousand Bermuda houses before it reached the *Ramadan*. In the space of a dozen breaths the dazzling light was gone and the blizzard swept down on them.

The old ship met it with all the fighting spirit hammered into her by the dour wielders of heavy hammers on the Clyde. But engines designed thirty years before to drive her ten knots on as many tons of coal a day lacked the stamina to stand up on fair fighting terms to the fury that had sprung out of the dusty Texan plains.

Captain Denham left the breakfast table and hurried on deck. The three passengers following him up found the blue sky gone; in its place a driving grey that almost seemed night. Shrieking blasts

soon brought pounding seas that leaped aboard and surged into the forward well.

"What a startling change!" cried Lutterel. "One could hardly believe it possible. We can watch the storm through the smokeroom windows."

"I suppose it's a squall," said Vera Bayne, laughing as the spray dashed against the ports. "We saw one in Alicante that swamped several of the fishermen's little boats. It was over in a few minutes."

"It's dreadful, Vera," said her sister. "It is getting worse. Do you think there is any danger?"

"None at all, dear," answered Vera, laughingly. "There isn't, is there, Mr. Lutterel?"

"I think not," replied Lutterel. "But, of course, I've had very little experience of ships, and none at all of storms at sea. I am an architect—churches mostly, you know—and this is really my first sea holiday. But we are probably as safe here as we would be on land. The captain and officers are capable men, I'm sure. It will be a novel, and, let us hope, a brief experience—something to talk about afterwards. We had better remain here, don't you think? It will be stifling below with the doors all closed."

Captain Denham, clad in oilskins, had already taken his place beside the officer on the bridge. As surprised as any on board by this disturbance in the usually calm belt, he guessed that what had come was but the forerunner of an even stronger blow. He frowned as he watched the greybacks leaping house-heavy over the old ship's bows.

"A pretty dose of trash she's giving us, Mr. Wilson,"

he said. "I don't like to see the hatches covered with that weed. They might be stove in and no one the wiser. Send your men along to clear it away."

After fumbling inside his oilskin, the mate withdrew his whistle and blew it shrilly. At the sound, the door of the fiddley opened and the watch came out.

"For'rad the watch, and clear that raff off the fore hatch," shouted the mate. "Keep your eyes well skinned in case she ships a heavy sea and traps you."

Watching for a lull, the men rushed forward; and dropping down into the well, tore at the long trailers of weed. Before their task was well begun a big sea broached aboard and filled the well to the rails. Clambering nimbly up the ladder again, the sailors rushed for the fiddley and safety.

"Tcha!" cried Captain Denham. "What lubbers of sailors we do get in these ships nowadays!" Tugging against the weight of the wind, he wrenched the chart-room door open and entered.

"Lord! The bottom's dropped out of the glass," he muttered, staring unbelievingly at the barometer. "We're in for something heavier than this—and it's taking her all her time to stand up to it as it is. Ease her down, Mr. Wilson," he ordered, making his way out again. "No use breaking things up. Bring her to half-speed and let her fall back a bit with it."

The telegraph clanged, and for a time the seas pounded in less heavily. Then the full shoulders of the gale came through, thrusting the *Ramadan's*

rusty nose aside, and bringing the charging seas out on the starboard bow.

Captain Denham watched his ship with a steadily growing uneasiness. She buried her head as the seas buffeted her, and somehow seemed loth to rise. He asked himself nervously whether or not it would be advisable to run the risk of turning her round and scudding before it. But even scudding in that mounting sea might be dangerous. A wave that seemed the father of ten thudded aboard, filling the well again and sending a sheet of watery devastation along the shelter deck.

Scared faces peered out from the lee fiddley as the captain reached out to the engine-room telegraph and rang down "Slow."

"Wait till she eases down, Mr. Wilson," he cried. "Then take your men along and see if that fore hatch is safe. She seems heavy about the head to me. I'll stay here and nurse her all I can to you. If that water gets below, it'll be a bad lookout for us."

Mr. Wilson was never, even at his best, a very willing man. From the nature of his work in better lines, he was but little accustomed to taking part in the actual work of the decks. Resenting the order to go forward himself, he left the bridge with a petulant gesture that did not escape the captain's notice. Rousing the watch out from the fiddley, he sent one for the carpenter with his wedges and maul.

Leading them forward, he directed the removal of the weed and the examination of the hatch, cursing the captain as he dodged the seas for an interfering

fool. The men tore away the long streamers and pitched them overboard. When the hatch was cleared, the tarpaulins were found to be adrift from the pinning battens in half a dozen places.

The mate's ill-tempered mutterings were instantly checked. His inactivity vanished. White-faced and shaking of fingers, he tugged at the stiff tarred sheets, urging the others into efforts as feverish as his own. His obvious fear soon communicated itself to his men. Questioning glances flashed from eye to eye, as wedges were stuck and hammered home.

But Wilson knew that the one thing all seamen dread had happened. The *Ramadan's* head was down by feet. Her buoyancy was sapped. The salt below had sucked in its own weight of water. Snarling a foul oath at the shrinking carpenter, he left the men abruptly and made his way to the bridge.

Captain Denham listened stonily to the mate's stammered report. His own worst fears found ample confirmation in the other's agitation.

"Hatches are your lookout, Mr. Wilson," he said angrily. "The carpenter's under no one's orders but yours. It's poor battening that won't stand an hours pounding. The water that's got below is making a sow of her. Her nose digs deeper every minute. Have you got it secured now?"

"How do I know?" asked the mate roughly, stung by the captain's sharp rebuke—the more that he knew it deserved. "I did the best I could. I don't want to break the men up, keeping them in that trap."

"A civil answer, if you please, Mr. Wilson," said

the captain shortly. "We'll drink salt water till our lungs burst if you don't make sure. Send word down to the Chief to start the bilge pump."

The mate blew down the speaking tube and sent the order along.

"Can't you turn her round and run for it?" he asked, jerkily.

"No," answered the captain sharply, convinced of the folly of his own idea when he heard it put into words by another man. "No. She'd swamp herself, even if she didn't turn turtle coming round. She's old, but she'd have weathered it out safely if you'd looked after your darned job. Call your men from under the fo'c's'le, and go down yourself and see the Chief. Tell him what's happened and ask him to drive his pumps full. Hey, you!" he shouted to the helmsman as the mate left. "Keep her head up! Give her wheel!"

"Hard down, sir," replied the helmsman.

Captain Denham craned over the pointer on the tell-tale disc. Hard-a-starboard it was! His eyes carried trouble as he turned them forward again. She was certainly well by the head. The mischief was done. And—she was his first command.

A man who shirked brutality, who sought no unfair advantage, he had gained it a year ago—he was nearing forty now—by steady, faithful service. Quiet of speech, considerate of the feelings of others, he had stuck to his old line and his old ship while breezier and more dashing friends had pushed their way into the great lines. Captain Denham had congratulated them and carried on.

Cursing the mate's carelessness, he gripped the bridge rail and thought out what had best be done. This, he knew, would be no time for spectacular action. The howling gale would decide for them. They must turn as its merciless grip bent them. If it lasted? If his fears materialized? But it wasn't as bad as all that yet.

Wilson was not the man he would have chosen for his mate had his choice been a wider one. But his own mate had tired of the long spell away from home, and returned to England. Wilson, an ex-officer of a leading line, had fallen foul of his elbow. An odd fish, who adjured all drinks outside pierheads, and sometimes for long spells even inside them, he had a trick of going off unexpectedly and indulging in a violent debauch. This had happened more than once.

Wilson, his outburst over, would avoid drink for perhaps a year, then—another outburst!

That sort of thing could not be tolerated in a line of the class in which he served. After his last gay adventure he had been given the option of discharging himself or being discharged. He had elected, most unwillingly, to resign; and Captain Denham, in pressing need of a chief officer, had taken him—not, however, before he had learned all there was to be learned concerning him.

Wilson, though soured and disappointed, behaved well according to his lights. But lacking the tramp mate's habit of personally supervising everything, he had contented himself with giving orders and assuming that they would be carried out to the letter.

Hence, thought Captain Denham, the clumsy, or careless, battening—and the present danger.

"The Chief's started the pumps, sir," reported Mr. Wilson on his return. "He says they are half choked already with salt slush. Pretty kettle of fish we've found, sir! She's dipping her head every time the seas rush her. I believe that damned water's finding its way below yet. I'll swear she's lower by the head! She'll dive soon, by Heaven! Hadn't —hadn't you better turn her round?"

"D'ye think I'm mad?" asked the captain bitterly. "Turn her round in this, and racket the engines off their beds. How can you run a ship that has her nose buried in the water and her stern in the air. She'd swing round to her own head-drag at once if you tried it. Get for'rad again and see if that hatch is secure."

"He's scared by the heavy seas," thought Captain Denham as the mate left. "He's never seen them so close before, perched up, as he's been, on those towering bridges. No wonder he's jerky! It's more than a dose. By the Lord, listen to the scream of it! Damn that well! I always distrusted it. If the superintendent had done as I wanted him to—strip a bulwark plate off on either side and leave the angle-iron—she'd have been as safe as a house. But what can one expect of engineers? Solid steel from the eyebrows up! I wonder how those passengers are getting on below? By God, I'll swear she's dipping still!"

The second mate, Stevens, and his watch were roused out to meet the emergency. They wedged

and hammered; but the slushy brine below beat in waves from side to side, creating great gusts of wind that ballooned the tarpaulins, and even lifted the wooden covers when the seas left them clear.

A tarpaulin split in their frantic stretching; and a demand for one to replace it led to the discovery that the fore-peak hatch had also been so carelessly battened that the water had found its way freely below. The peak was awash to the beams!

Wilson's anger mastered his fear as he grasped the imminence of this new danger. His fist rose, and the carpenter crashed heavily to the deck.

Captain Denham sensed ill news as the mate steadied himself along the shelter deck.

"What is it now?" he asked coldly, as Wilson mounted the bridge.

"The peak's full," faltered the officer. "If this blow doesn't break we'll dip. What about getting some provisions in the boats in case we should need them?"

"No harm in that," replied the master. "You might set a couple of men to do it. But I'm afraid it'll scare the rest of them if they see the boats being prepared. They wouldn't live five minutes in this racket."

"This old heeler mightn't live half that," growled Wilson, as a big greyback leaped aboard and buried her bows in a smother of boiling foam.

The old ship rolled sluggishly, thrashing the water from one side of her decks to the other. Her head fell away again. Captain Denham slid to the telegraph and rang down for full speed to drive her into

the wind's eye. But if the speed was increased, the effect on the steering was unnoticeable. Her heavy head still flinched from the greyback's thunderous blows.

The seamen, now fully alarmed, rushed out of the flooded well, and catching at whatever gave hold, made their way aft again. Grouping round the foot of the bridge ladder, they glared questioningly up at the men into whose hands their destiny had passed. The second mate thrust them unceremoniously aside and clattered up to the bridge.

"The peak's awash, sir," he shouted. "This looks like End-O! What about the boats?"

"Tell the steward to pass out provisions, Mr. Stevens," said the captain, with obvious reluctance. "We'll have everything ready—in case. But if she floats until this burst's over we're safer here."

. . . . .

Stevens, the second officer, in spite of his eager inquiries, had never been in a lifeboat in his life, save to paint one. He was a man of abundant courage, but little discretion. Although wise enough to realise the danger to the ship, he laughed contemptuously at the greater danger in the frail boats.

"Give me the boats before this old sieve," he answered. "Down with you chaps!" he shouted. "Get the provisions up and put them into the boats. Look alive, burn you! Move yourselves!"

The men, a startled question in every eye, followed him down the companionway, making the place re-echo with the sound of their heavy boots on the brass stair treads. Tasker, the steward, came out as they

invaded his saloon. Mr. Lutterel, and the two sisters, left the smoke-room, and, stirred by a sudden dread of coming disaster, followed Stevens below.

"What's the matter, Mr. Stevens?" asked the chief steward in surprise.

"End-O! That's the matter," cried the second mate. "Provisions for the boats, quick! She's underwater for'rad. That swine of a carpenter! Let's have them out, lively."

"Abandon ship?" gasped the steward, white to the lips. "In this?"

"Aye. In this. Let's have a stiff peg, Tasker," he said, pushing past the steward. "It's anyone's now," as the steward protested.

As the second mate drained off his peg, Mr. Lutterel crossed the saloon.

"What's this, Mr. Stevens," he asked, quietly. "Did you say we are to leave the ship? Is there anything wrong besides the storm?"

"She's nearly under for'rad," replied the second mate. "Best get your gear packed. She'll not float a quarter of an hour."

"Has Captain Denham given orders that we are to go into the boats?" asked the passenger.

"Not yet," answered the second mate, thrusting him aside. "He will in a few minutes. Stand out of the way. Pass that stuff up, you men."

As the provisions were passed up the news flew along the alleyway. Men of the firemen's watch below hurried into their grimy rags and joined in the work. The engineers listened incredulously. The weather was bad, they knew; and the water that had got

below made things worse. But this? Hard though they were, and inured to danger, they shrank back dismayed.

The provisions out, Stevens demanded spirits for the boats. The steward, even in the palsy of fright, remembered the captain's strict injunctions, and hesitated irresolutely.

"Hand it over, burn you," growled Stevens. "D'ye want men perishing for a drink in the boats? Hand it over, you scared fool!"

Stevens opened the spirit-room, and diving in, passed the bottles out. A fireman, with a sly glance at the mate's back, and a grin and wink to his all-too-ready fellows, knocked the neck off a bottle against the marble top of the sideboard and drank from the splintered neck, cutting his lips in his eagerness.

The bottle was quickly snatched from his hand and passed round. They drank, gulping and choking as the neat spirit bit. Others, too eager, too impatient, to await their turn, followed the fireman's example and knocked the necks off other bottles. Stevens, with a tardy remembrance of his rank, tried to assert his vanishing authority; but those who were already inflamed with drink, and, no less, those who were determined to get it, thrust him contemptuously aside.

The sisters, clinging to the handrail, and swinging helplessly to the sickening roll of the over-burdened vessel, watched the mutinous crew wild-eyed. Mr. Lutterel disappeared into his berth and reappeared with two stout bulges in his pockets.

The saloon soon reeked with the acrid fumes of the

spilt spirit. Bottle necks rolled across the carpet or were crunched into it under heavy boots. Laughing and staggering, they emptied the spirit locker, leaving the wines and minerals as unworthy of their notice, then lurched out to secure their belongings.

The second mate, conscious that he had played no valiant part, looked after them sheepishly. Turning, he found Lutterel's eyes fixed scornfully on him. With a defiant laugh, and a fine show of careless bravado, he picked up a bottle of wine and smashed the neck across the brass rail of the sideboard. As he raised it to his lips, a heavy pistol crashed down and splintered the bottle to fragments.

"Out of this, you damned traitor," said the passenger, pushing the pistol barrel between his eyes with such force that the officer's head jerked sharply back. "Outside! Get those boats out while you're sober. Go!"

Stevens cowered at the look in the passenger's eyes. Backing out through the saloon door, he turned and ran nimbly down the alleyway.

The engineers, relying as always on the sea-sense of the officers, stopped the foolish second mate and questioned him anxiously. Assured by him that the abandonment was certain, they took what goods they had packed and made their way on deck, none too eager to face death in those cockleshells of boats in this sudden and destructive hurricane.

Captain Denham, startled by the appearance of the whole of his engine-room and stokehold staff, ran down from the bridge.

"What in the devil's name are you men doing up

here?" he demanded. "Who's looking after the engines?"

"The secont mate tel't us 'twas abondon ship," replied an engineer. "Them's your orders, air they no?"

"Good God, no, man," answered the captain. "I told the fool to put some provisions into the boats in case anything happened. This came suddenly and it will pass suddenly. It will blow itself out in an hour. Go below. We're safer here than in those boats."

"My name's 'Get out now'," hiccoughed a fireman. "This old coffin'll be under in l-less'n an 'our, an' you knows it. S-she's f-finished."

"All hands back from those boats," cried the captain. "I am not going to abandon this ship."

"We are!" shouted a sailor. "A chance there's worth two here."

"Keep them away from those boats, you officers," cried the captain. "They are going to certain death."

"I'm going with them," said the second mate, truculently.

"You? You're mad, man! Heavens!" he cried in horrified amazement. "These men have been drinking. They're drunk! You've been drinking, too. You've been broaching stores. A sweet officer you are. Who gave you authority to say that I was abandoning my ship, you lying scoundrel?"

But the men had stripped the covers off the boats. Tailing on to the falls they "Yo-ho'd" drunkenly, sweeping backward and forward to the roll of the ship like Breton onions on a string. As the boats

lifted from the chocks, Wilson left the captain's side and joined the rest.

Captain Denham turned on him in bitter anger.

"Are you mad, too?" he asked. "It was through your damned carelessness that the water got below. Now you would lead these drunken fools to the death you've set for them."

"The time for talk's past," said the mate. "I'm not crazy enough to stay here and drown. Better grab what you can and come with us. Whose fault it was doesn't matter a curse now."

The captain turned from him angrily, impatiently.

"Out of those boats, you drunken scum," he roared. "No man leaves this ship with my permission. Out of them."

At this a seaman drew his sheath-knife and grinned menacingly.

"You just try to stop us and see what happens," he snarled. "D'yer want us to drown like blinkin' rats? You do th' 'stick to th' ship' stunt yerself if yer wants to. We're goin', an' that's the end of it. Hey, Donneley. Look alive if you're comin'."

The seaman's call brought the helmsman hurrying down the bridge ladder.

"Back to your wheel, you scoundrel," cried Captain Denham, sternly.

"Take the blissid whale y'silf, me bhoy," said the helmsman. "I'm goin' wid th' rist. Kape yer hands off of me, plaze."

Realising how unfair it would be to hold one man while others went, Captain Denham let the man pass. He went back up the ladder to the bridge again and

spun the wheel hard down. Slipping a check rope over the spokes, he went through the communication door leading to the chart-room. A moment later he emerged eagerly.

"Swing those boats inboard again, you officers," he cried. "The glass has jumped up three tenths. This blow's nearly over. You're safe enough here."

But the time for intervention, or reflection, was past. Led by the officers, the men worked unheedingly on.

"Come with us if you're coming," bellowed Wilson. "Make your mind up, and be sharp about it. We're getting clear before she dips, and takes the boats with her. What does it matter if the glass rises a dozen tenths? This old packet's finished!"

"I'm not going," cried the captain. "And no man leaves this ship with my permission. Remember that, if we ever meet again! What about the passengers, Wilson, you cowardly cur?"

"Let them come if they're coming," replied the mate. "But, by heavens, they'll have to be damned quick about it. She's on the dip, now. Our lives are as precious to us as theirs."

Mr. Lutterel, who with the two women passengers had watched the crew's preparations for departure from the lee door of the smoke-room, stepped out to the deck. In a voice that carried above the gale he asked:

"Shall I stop this business for you, captain? Say the word and I'll wing a dozen of them. I'll shoot your mates, and kill them too, with all the pleasure imaginable."

"No! For God's sake, no!" answered the har-

rassed captain. "They are fools led by cowards. There's death in front of them. Are you mad, too, chief?" he asked as he saw the old engineer pitch his bag in.

"The watter's on the stokehold plates, and the pumps air choked wi' salt," replied the chief. "She'll no' flot hairf an hoor. Ah'm takkin' ma chance, captain, an' Ah ken it's a puir yin. Ah've left the engines runnin' full tae keep her head up to th' sea. Ah'm sorry, Denham, old fren', but it's the only chance Ah see."

Captain Denham swung into the chart-room and as hurriedly returned.

"The glass has jumped another two tenths," he called. "Stay where you are for your own sakes. I'm risking it. Do you the same."

"Glass be damned!" roared Wilson. "Slack away your falls! In, all that mean to come. She's going! Don't wait listening to that fool's prating till she sucks you down. Slack away, Stevens. Slack away all and get clear."

Captain Denham, realising the futility of further argument or appeal, walked away. The stiff tackles creaked. A slapping crash sounded above the gale as the first boat struck the water. He shuddered as the sound was followed by that of the second boat. A voice at his elbow spun him round.

"The boats have gone. Have we a chance left here?" asked Mr. Lutterel. "You are the captain and an experienced man. I'll take your word for it."

"You have a chance," replied the captain. "It's a

very poor one, but it's better than theirs. Those boats, full of drunken fools, won't get a mile in this sea. As I told them, the glass is rising and the wind is falling. I can't bring myself to look at them. Are they still in sight ?"

"Yes," replied Lutterel. "I can see only one, though. She's flying like an arrow down the wind. God!" he cried in horror. "She's capsized! She's gone!"

. . . . . .

The barque's royals crept over the rim of the horizon on the afternoon of the seventh day. At Captain Denham's exclamation, Mr. Lutterel looked eagerly in the direction in which the captain pointed, and presently he saw the two tiny grey dots. The sisters came from under the awning that had been rigged to shelter them. Constance Bayne gazed at the specks with an eager interest which the week's unavailing search had almost killed.

Vera had never lost hers. Her eyes had swept the rim of the world of waters for hours. She had even insisted on sharing the watch throughout the night for passing ships or their lights, while the men and her sister slept.

"Will she pass close enough to sight us, captain ?" asked Lutterel. "Things might be worse here, one admits; but the feel of a deck underfoot would be welcome. The blizzard that foundered the *Ramadan* may not be the only one to come this way. When I remember the terrible fate of your crew—lost within sight of their ship—the struggle we had to launch

this boat, and keep her afloat until the sea subsided, I confess to feeling a bit uneasy."

"I am uneasy myself, more than a little," declared Captain Denham. "I expected to have sighted some vessel days ago, for we are not out of the track of ships. It's the water that's troubling me. The breaker's almost empty. We should have used it more sparingly."

"You should have spoken before; warned us to exercise more care, captain," said the passenger gravely. "When lives are at stake it is unwise to refrain from taking any, even the sternest, measures."

"I expected to have been picked up, as I said. You have not been wasteful, and I have exercised the greatest care. I thought of mentioning it yesterday, but I was afraid of frightening the women. However, if we can close up with that barque before night falls it will see the end of all our troubles—yours rather, for mine will begin when I get home and have to answer for the loss of my ship. I'll work over as soon as I can make out how she's heading."

"Can't you tell now?" asked Lutterel.

"No. She puzzles me," lifting the glass again. "Her main royal is squared, but the fore is braced sharp up. She appears to be in stays. But even if she were tacking it should be over long before this."

An hour's sailing raised the barque's topsails. Hope rose, only to be dashed again when she slewed around and headed away from them. The almost-dry water breaker checked the angry cry that rose to the captain's lips. No use frightening the passengers more than could be helped.

Main yards aback and fore sails full, the barque circled aimlessly round on her heel and slowly drifted back to her course again.

"What is it, captain?" asked Lutterel. "What's wrong with her?"

"I can't say yet," replied the captain in troubled tones. "She may be a derelict—but all her masts are standing. She may——"

"What?" asked Lutterel as the captain paused.

"She may be stricken with plague—and her crew dead. She is certainly not under control. I don't like the look of her. Perhaps we are safer here."

"The water is almost gone," whispered Lutterel. "You cannot mean it!"

"Some steamer may pick us up——"

"Yes," said the passenger, "raving maniacs or rotting corpses. Captain, we must find out—be sure that that vessel is the greater risk before we let this chance of rescue slip. Think of those helpless women!"

"Speak lower. It is of them I am thinking," replied the captain as the barque circled round again.

"You shall not let this vessel pass us without further knowledge of her," said the passenger, insistently. "All our lives are at stake. You must work the boat as close as possible before the light fails."

"I'll do that," replied Captain Denham. "But I certainly won't board unless I am sure that it is safe to do so."

Vera Bayne, the younger but more valiant of the sisters, left her station in the bows, and coming aft, joined them.

"We are nearing her!" she cried eagerly. "We shall be aboard soon?"

"The captain is undecided whether to board her or not," said Lutterel. "Her manœuvres," he added, quietly, "seem to him to indicate that she is either abandoned, or that her crew are stricken down with sickness and unable to manage her. He intends to be cautious."

"One may be too cautious, Mr. Lutterel," said Vera, bluntly. "We cannot find out unless we approach her. It would be cruel to condemn my sister to another week in this boat. There is plenty of water and food——"

"Food, yes. But the water is almost finished To-morrow will see us without any," said Lutterel, grimly. "It is right that you should know."

"We must reach that ship," said the girl, turning away.

The tropic night—twilight there was none—closed in with startling suddenness. The light seemed to have fallen into the sea, leaving it a glowing heave of phosphorescence. With the passing of day the breeze fell. Captain Denham lowered the flapping sail, and thrusting a long oar over the stern, sculled towards the barque, while Lutterel kept the stem clear of the deadening weed.

They lost her in the gloom; but, to their relief, lights appeared aboard and guided them. An hour's heavy sculling saw them close to her. Captain Denham drew in the oar, and all listened attentively for some sound of life; but all that reached them was the mournful creaking of her cordage, and the

beating of the blocks against her masts and rigging as she rolled.

Then the silence was broken by the roar of angry voices. Someone screamed—a scream of shrill terror. The sound of thudding feet echoed along her decks.

"There's something very wrong there," said Captain Denham. "I'm not going to take these ladies aboard that ship. I shall keep away again and trust to some other ship picking us up."

"Captain Denham," said Lutterel, in a voice that brooked no argument, "you are going to put me aboard that vessel. I don't ask you to accompany me, or to bring these ladies. But I am going aboard to see what is wrong, and if possible to find some means of rescue for us all. Don't refuse, captain. Don't argue. I am not a man with whom argument is safe. Put me alongside, and keep the boat away until I ask you to bring her in."

"You may be murdered there," cried the captain. "We don't even know her nationality."

"I'll chance that. I have my revolvers, and I'm a first-class shot. I can take care of myself. Put me alongside."

"If it is plague——"

"I'll remain. There will be one less for the water. If I don't return, well—do your best for these ladies until some ship picks you up. I sincerely hope it will be soon. Scull in as quietly as you can, and let me climb aboard."

"I don't care to——"

"Captain, I insist. I warn you that you cross me at your peril. Put me alongside and sheer off."

Dominated by the will of this strangely changed man, a man whose mildness of speech and manner had been very noticeable during the voyage of the ill-fated *Ramadan*, the captain yielded reluctantly. Dropping the oar into the rowlock again, he sculled as silently as possible towards the barque's fore chains. As they drew near, Lutterel strapped on his bandolier and thrust his pistols into their holsters. A silent hand grip, by way of farewell, and he poised ready in the bows. When the chain channels came within reach he grasped them and thrust the boat backwards with his foot. Steadying himself as she glided astern, he peered keenly along the strange vessel's dark decks.

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Her deck-house was within a full stretch of his arm. From somewhere within he heard a voice—a voice that babbled ceaselessly, incoherently. Waiting until the faint click of the oar had died in the distance, Lutterel grasped the lanyards of the lower shrouds and drew himself over the bulwarks. His rubber-soled shoes gave no sound as he dropped to the deck, and crept, silently as a cat, towards the voice. Peering through an open port he saw a negro, frightened to the verge of insanity, kneeling and praying on the floor of the vessel's galley.

Himself unobserved—for the black man's eyes never lifted from some savage god of his imagining—Lutterel watched the barque's cook and listened to his gabbled prayer. The utterances were too rapid, the accent too unfamiliar for him to follow the black's crazy supplications. Turning aft, he stared along the deck. From a port under the high poop a light

streamed. A hoarse jumble of sound reached him—the sound of rough voices, the voices of many men. For a second he thought—then acted. Walking stealthily round to the galley door he pushed it in, and reaching the negro in a springing stride, thrust a pistol barrel between his eyes.

The mouthed prayer froze on the black man's lips. His eyes rolled upwards until the whites alone showed. His white teeth parted, then came together and rattled like castanets. In the face of the man above him he read a deadly menace. Lutterel's eyes seemed to threaten instant destruction. The whimsical, smiling mouth was gone—in it's place was a savage gash to shudder at.

"Mercy! Mercy!" gasped the negro.

"Silence! Speak low!" hissed Lutterel. "What is wrong aboard this vessel?"

"Mutiny, sah," stammered the shaking black. "D' Scorp'yin, an' Stephano d' Greek, done stab'd cap'n an' mate, an' take d' ship dis mornin', sah."

"Mutiny, eh? Where are they?" asked Lutterel.

"In d' fore cabin, sah. Dey's drinkin' rum from d' hold till dey's crazy. D'Scorp'yin jes' wanted to cut ma throat, for fun he done say, jes' t' see if black man's blood amd' same colour as oder men's. He'd a done it too, sah, on'y dem oders med him keep me for cookin'."

"Speak low. How many are there?" asked the architect.

"Dey's Stephano d' Greek—hed' worst. He stab d' mate—gib him no warnin', sah. An' dey's Tony d' Rook Scorp'yin—he's a Gibralter rat. Dey's tree

Germans, Weber, Becker, an' Rawl; an' a big Arab nigger name Mahmud. Dem's arl d' sailors. Den deres ol' Wilmer, d' bos'n an' carpenter; an' young Dick Bedford, th' apprentice, jes' outen his time."

"Eight," said Lutterel, "and you. Are the captain and mate dead?"

"D' mate was dead, sah, I'se sure. Stephano don't make no mistakes. Tony d' Scorp'yin he kill d' cap'n from behind when he run out t' see what wrong. Den big Mahmud he pick dem up an' heab dem oberboard. Ah looked ober d' side an' Ah seed d' cap'n swimmin' roun' an' roun'. Tony threw a belayin' pin at he's haid an' hit him. Den he sank."

"Poor devils! What part did you play in this hell's drama? Your hand was in it, too, wasn't it?"

"Ah nebber done a ting, sah. Ah'll swar ah didn't. Ah nebber knewed dey was gwin t' do it. Gorramighty, sah," he chattered as Lutterel's eyes seared him, "you isn't gwin t' kill me, sah, is you? Don't, for mercy's sake, sah! Don't!"

"Lower your voice," hissed Lutterel. "Have they any firearms?"

"Tony done got d' cap'n's gun, sah," quivered the cook, huskily. "It fell outen his hand when he drop t' d' deck. D' Greek he got d' mate's outen his room. Arl d' oders got's der sheath knives, sah. Don't you kill a poor nigger, sah, for d' Lord's sake. Who'n d' name o' God is you, sah? Whar in heben you come from?"

"Hold your tongue," spat Lutterel. "Answer my questions. Ask none of your own. Whether I let

you live depends on yourself. Stand up. Take that apron off, and turn your back."

The black cook's apron was placed over his mouth and lashed firmly with its long strings. Gripping him by the arms, Lutterel thrust him outside the galley door. Backing him to the bulwarks, he fastened him securely with a rope to the main rail. After running his hands over him to assure himself that the black had no weapons concealed about him, he left him and turned aft.

Half way he stopped and melted into the shadows as a man came out of the cabin, and mounting the poop, looked around for ships or lights. A pistol covered him as he crossed from port to starboard, and went down the ladder again into the barque's saloon.

Gripping his pistols, the architect crept on again until he reached the open porthole under the poop's break. A rattling, stentorious breathing was very audible—the breathing of one overcome by the fiery liquor whose pungent fumes reached even out on to the deck. A silky, sibilant voice was speaking:

"Eef you ain't a-willin' for do whata we want, Bedford, you follow de odders. Navigate sout' de Canary I'lan's an' bringa to Cap Bojadar. Mahmud taka charge den an' pilot us into de ribber. Which you like? Dat or de sharks?"

"It would be the sharks or the knife, anyway, as soon as you'd got your bearings," replied another voice. "Why should I be your tool?"

"Cas y' got to, y' dog," cried another, shrilly. "Cutta da swine troat, Stephano. Wha' da good keep heem? We find Bojadar widout heem."

"We keepa him, Tony," replied the Greek. "He de on'y navigata lef' on board. You keep quiet. I watcha Mis' Bedford."

Lifting his eyes cautiously over the rim of the port, Lutterel found himself looking into the barque's white fore cabin. Seated in the captain's chair was a cunning-looking, oily skinned man of swarthy complexion—Stephano the Greek, beyond a doubt. By him sat another, whose savage eyes were rimmed red as a mad dog's. A stubborn-looking youth glared sulky defiance at both.

A chart was spread upon the long table. Below it rested a squat jug. Before the others, ranged down either side, were cups and cannikans of the fiery spirit. The others, who seemed to leave the handling of the youth to the two great villains, were men of Teutonic stock, excepting one half-breed whom Lutterel judged to be Mahmud the Arab. A grey-haired man, on whose pate a bald patch showed, sprawled drunkenly across the table. Noting the positions of all, the architect stepped silently back, and entering the alleyway, jerked the door open and faced them.

"The man who moves dies," he snarled.

. . . . . .

Consternation was depicted on every face. The Scorpion's hand flew to his hip. A heavy revolver flashed into sight. Lutterel's pistol spoke. The revolver dropped to the table—with it the Scorpion's trigger finger. The blood spurted across the chart as the Gib. rat's screams shattered the silence.

Stephano's eyes were fixed, steadily as a cobra's, on the stranger at the door. He tensed for an oppor-

tunity, but none was given. Lutterel's merciless eyes missed nothing.

"Pick that revolver up—by the barrel, you dog!—and pitch it through the port. Quick!"

Stephano read death in the other's glare. Lifting the bloody revolver, he obeyed.

"Your own now! Quick, do you hear?"

The unwavering barrel of the architect's magazine pistol gave speed to the Greek's movements. Scowling venomously, he sent his own weapon hurtling after the other.

"You wretched villains!" said Lutterel, bitterly, "I am half inclined to kill you all. Take your knives out and throw them after those guns. You first. At once if you value your filthy skin."

"I had nothing to do with it," stammered the youth, Bedford.

"Silence!" said the architect sternly. "You are sitting with these beasts and drinking with them. Obey me. Instantly!"

Bedford withdrew his knife and pitched it out of the port. The others, awed by the merciless face of the avenger, made haste to follow suit.

"That drunken brute's," said Lutterel.

Bedford leaned over and took the knife from the sleeping man, whom even the noise of the shot had not aroused. As it clattered to the deck, Lutterel asked:

"Where is the key of this room?"

Several hands pointed to where a key swung on a hook.

"Pass it down to me."

Bedford slid the key down the long table. As

Lutterel bent to pick it up, Stephano threw his second knife.

It missed Lutterel by a hair's breadth and quivered in the frame of the door behind his head. The shots that answered its coming cut the tips from the Greek's ears before he dropped below the level of the table. The next shot shattered the jug, sending the burning spirit into the faces of those nearest. Before the sound died, another extinguished the lamp. In the darkness, Lutterel stepped backwards. Slamming the door, he locked it before any within could move to hinder him.

"Remember!" he cried, as he pocketed the key, "these bullets will pass through those panels as easily as through paper. If any of you attempt to open this door, I'll fire through into the thick of you."

As he listened outside, a hoarse growling arose. Oaths followed heavy blows and the harsh scraping of feet.

"You——! You looka out an' sat all-a clear. I loosa da fing true you," screamed the Scorpion.

Stephano's cold voice soon dominated them all into silence. The door was quietly tried. A shot through the panels sent them scampering back in alarm.

. . . . . .

Risking further attempts in his absence, Lutterel ran swiftly along the deck and removed the gag from the negro's mouth.

"Listen," he said, "I don't know whether you are to be trusted any more than those ruffians aft, but I am going to release you. Act treacherously, and I'll

hunt you out, even if you hide in a rat hole and kill you."

"Massa, massa," wailed the cook, "ah clar t' me heben ah knowed nothin' about it. I'se honest, sah."

"You'd better prove honest," snapped the architect, casting the black adrift. "Bring me a plank and a hammer and nails."

"Yes, sah. I done bring dem right now, sah," said the negro eagerly. "Is dem men fast, sah? I'se jes' skeered t' def o' dem."

"They are fast. Bring the things aft to me. And a lamp."

Speeding aft again, he resumed his watch. The negro brought the plank and the hammer and nails. Lutterel held the lamp while the cook nailed the plank across the door. Both sighed thankfully when the last long nail was driven in.

"Gather those knives and guns from the deck and pitch them overboard," ordered Lutterel. "Now, walk in front of me to the forecastle head."

The brass lamp cast ghostly shadows as the frightened negro, followed by the soft-footed architect, passed along the lazily-heaving deck. The sails slatted to the roll, the sagging braces whipped tight as the yards swung, the loose chain sheets thrashed noisily against the iron masts. Yet, through all the noises, the stillness that brooded over the vast ocean was distinctly audible.

The black cast uneasy glances over his shoulder at the noiseless jailer who followed him, wondering if this cruel-faced apparition was indeed a saviour or a greater danger than the fiends behind the barricade

aft. Reaching the forecastle, Lutterel handed the lamp to the negro and bade him hold it high above his head.

"Boat, ahoy! Boat, ahoy!" he hailed.

"Hallo! Hallo!" The answer floated back as from an immense distance. "Bring the boat in, captain. Come alongside."

A quarter of an hour elapsed before the boat's white bow crept within the circle of light thrown by the lamp.

"What's wrong? Is there sickness aboard?" asked the captain, turning the boat's head away and ceasing to row.

"No," replied Lutterel. "There is neither sickness nor trace of it. Come aboard."

"What has been wrong?" asked the captain. "Where is the captain of that ship? I'm not coming aboard with these ladies until I know that it's safe to do so."

"There has been trouble aboard, captain, but it is now under control. Come aboard. I guarantee your safety."

"That's all very well, Mr. Lutterel," demurred the captain. "But perhaps if you got us some fresh water, and came back with us——"

"I'm not coming back, captain," said the passenger coldly. "I have given you my word——"

"Put us aboard that ship, captain!" Vera Bayne's voice rang sharp and clear. "Mr. Lutterel has won us a chance of escape. We will trust him. If you will not go, put us aboard."

"It may not be safe, Miss Vera," said the captain.

"Safe!" she cried. "Are we safe here, Even if

it means death it is better to face it with a brave man. Put us aboard."

"All right," said Captain Denham, doubtfully. "I'll come alongside and see. Hold the light in the mizzen chains."

The negro's white teeth bared joyfully when the captain dropped on deck. Here was patent and visible sign—in the gold-laced uniform—of the return of discipline and the end of fear. He saluted Captain Denham as he would salute a god.

Under skilful questioning he told all he knew of the mutiny. Lutterel spoke briefly of the measures he had taken to secure the mutineers. They examined the plank fastening, and as a further precaution strengthened it. Captain Denham's scruples grew momentarily less. The possibility of bringing home the *Morning Mist*, and wiping out the stain of losing the *Ramadan*, gripped him strongly. Preceded by the cook with the lantern, he made a rapid inspection and determined to risk all on this further chance the gods had given him.

* * * * * *

The lazarette was prepared, and at break of day—a welcome break after the anxious night—Lutterel, pistols in hand, took his stand where he commanded a clear view of the entrance to the fore cabin. The plank was prised off. When all was ready, Captain Denham turned the key, and flinging the door open, stepped back.

"Any man, other than the one I name, who attempts to leave that room gets a bullet!" Lutterel's voice

carried conviction to the tensed mob inside. "Come out, Stephano the Greek!"

The Greek neither answered nor moved. Lutterel waited a moment, then challenged again.

"Pitch that Greek out, you men, or I'll kill you all."

Pushed and thrust by the others, Stephano stumbled into the passage. A violent heave by Captain Denham sent him sprawling over the high step, and out on the deck. The door was closed and the key quickly turned.

Stephano steadied himself and glared at his captors. his white lips twisted in a vicious snarl. He took one swift stride towards Lutterel. One only! A pistol spat, and the Greek pitched forward on his face.

The fear of death was in his eyes as he lifted to his knees. He stared, incredulously, looking through bolting eyes at his feet for the blood he expected. All he saw was a boot-heel that hung by a thread. Lifting his eyes again, he found the pistol lining between his eyes.

"Get up, you yellow beast," said the architect. "Rise and walk before me."

Stephano turned, and, with the pistol barrel in his back, walked to the lazarette hatch.

"Down, you dog!" cried Lutterel. "Down, and think of the old man you murdered! Down and wait for the rope!"

The cowed Greek went down. Spitting bitter invective as the darkness swallowed him, the waiting negro snapped down the hatch. Lutterel returned to the deck. At his nod, the captain opened the door again.

"Come out, Antonio the Scorpion," cried Lutterel.

Almost before the words were uttered, the Scorpion was hurled out. The door closed behind him as he came. Wheeling nimbly he sought to return, but a heavy kick sent him flying out.

Without a second's hesitation he turned and sped like a hare along the deck. He had reached the main-mast when the bullet struck his heel, pitching him heavily on his skull. As he lay stunned, Lutterel strode forward, and gripping him by the clothing, dragged him unceremoniously to the hatch and pitched him below.

"God, man! You might have broken his neck. Perhaps you have," cried Captain Denham.

"And if I have, what then?" asked Lutterel coldly. "These men are mine, captain, to make or break as I please."

"I'll have no hand in violence—no more, at least, than can be helped," said the perturbed captain.

"This ship is mine," said Lutterel. "I took her. If you thwart me, you take the consequences."

"Have your own way, then," said the captain. "The law would probably clear you if you massacred them all. They are outlaws. But I detest that sort of thing. Who else do you intend to put below? We must have men to steer and work the sails."

"The Arab only. Open the door, and send him out."

As his name was called, the Arab stalked proudly out. Lutterel pointed to the lazarette. Too much a fatalist to need urging, or scorning any, he descended unmoved. Snapping the padlock, the black cook breathed audible relief, and handed the key to the captain.

Captain Denham opened the door again, and called out: "Wilmer!" The old man who held the dual rank of carpenter and boatswain—he whose grey head had rested on the table—came out, blinking at the light, and shaking from the effects of the raw rum.

"You were an officer here," said Lutterel. "I have been told you struck no blow in defence of your captain and chief mate. What have you to say?"

Wilmer told a tale of abject terror, of joining them, or pretending to join them, to save his own skin. He pleaded that he was an old man and weak. He wept his sorrow.

"Do you want him, captain?" asked Lutterel. "Or shall I put him below with the others?"

Captain Denham, from a vast experience of his class, felt a thrill of pity for the broken old sailor. He would have spoken to him; but in the presence of this ruthless man he felt little less than a prisoner himself.

"Let him go free for a while," he said, diffidently. "If he fails us——"

"His life ends. You understand, my man?"

"Yes, sir," answered the old man humbly.

"Stand aside. Bring Bedford out, captain."

"What have you to say for yourself?" asked Lutterel, contemptuously. "You, at any rate, are neither old nor weak. Did you stand by and watch your officers butchered?"

"I was asleep. Below. I knew nothing."

"But you would have navigated the ship for them?"

"It was that or the knife. What could I do?"

"A brave man can always die," said Lutterel,

scornfully. "And it were better to die bravely than, like a dog, at a rope's end."

"I can die now," said Bedford. "You are handy enough with that gun of yours. Use it."

"The law shall decide your fate," said Lutterel coldly. "You may join your fellow-villains in the lazarette, or, if Captain Denham cares to trust you, help to work the ship home. Will you trust him, captain?"

"Yes, I think so. Let him stand aside."

"Bring the Germans. Let all three come out."

"Is that safe?" asked the captain uneasily.

"Quite," said Lutterel.

The remaining mutineers shambled out—three sorry specimens who lacked the courage of a single man. They protested that they knew nothing of the plot. Like Bedford, they had been below—they were starboard watchmen. The three murderers were in the port watch.

"You joined them afterwards and drank with them," said Lutterel.

"Vell," said Weber, "if ve hadn't done, dem fellers vould haf killed us. Ve eggspegt dey vould haf done so ven dey got der schip ofer to der African coast. Ve vos glat enough dot you came."

"Will you work?" asked Lutterel.

"Vy, off course," said Becker. "Dot's vot ve're here for. Ve've done nodings, so nobody can't do nodings mid us."

"Dot's so," said Rawl. "Ve didn't make no trubbles, an' ve don't vant none."

Sending Wilmer to the wheel, Captain Denham

squared away for the Channel. The men worked feverishly, urged to strenuous efforts by the knowledge that the saturnine Lutterel, and his pistols, were never very far from them. An hour's work saw the *Morning Mist's* top-hamper ship-shape again. None that might have passed her, with all sails drawing and a straight wake behind, would ever have guessed that murder, most foul and cruel, had been committed aboard her less than a sun's climb ago.

The sisters soon regained their courage and ventured on deck; and in a few days, save for the knowledge that beneath their feet were those slayers of old men for whom the pit yawned, the time flew past swiftly and pleasantly. The architect passed hours at the saloon table writing, rising occasionally to make a swift tour of the decks. His baleful glare as he passed the crew reminded them most forcibly that their present liberty was of his granting and might be withdrawn at his pleasure.

Twelve days later found the *Morning Mist* within sight of the Channel coast. A light wind gave bare steerageway. Lutterel hailed a fishing boat that was passing near, and tossing down a bulky letter and a coin, asked the skipper to see the letter safely posted. The promise given, the smack sheered off.

A flutter of flags off Beachy Head told Lloyd's of the return of the *Morning Mist* and the loss of the *Ramadan*. Two hours afterwards a tug with crowded decks slipped down the Thames and met the barque off Dover. Sheering alongside she disgorged her living freight on to the *Morning Mist's* deck. A stout, red-faced man—the superintendent of his line—rushed

excitedly up the poop ladder and gripped the captain's hand.

"By gad, Denham, you're wonderful! Wonderful! How in the name of heaven did you manage it? The country's ringing with your exploit. And we thought you were a bit on the slow side! Slow, by gad! You! You're made, Denham. The Firm's delighted. You're to have the best ship in the line."

"I—I don't understand, Mr. Wilmot," said the captain. "What have you heard? And from whom?"

"Don't understand! By the only Jones, that's good. I suppose you'd have crept up the river and told nobody? It would be like you, you old duffer. Some passenger of yours, chap named Lutterel, sent a full account to all the papers. Look here. Read for yourself."

As the captain read, his hair-roots stung. *His* heroism, *his* foresight, *his* resourcefulness! No mention, beyond a careless word or two, of that savage, ruthless man whose intrepidity had made the impossible possible. As the tug drew ahead, and tautened her hawser, Captain Denham went below. Lutterel was in his berth busy with his packing.

"Look here, Mr. Lutterel," said the captain. "I've just read this yarn you sent ashore. It's a devil of a long way from being near the truth. In fact, it isn't true."

The old satyr-like, snarling Lutterel barked: "If *I* say it's true, it *is* true."

Captain Denham drew back in alarm. Then Lutterel's mask fell. Leaning back he shook with silent laughter.

"Captain," he chuckled, "be wise. Take the goods the gods have provided. Even if I were to assume it, the mantle would ill become a builder of churches. Miss Bayne and I are being married as soon as possible. That surprises you, eh? I think you were too engrossed in the problem of getting the barque safely home to heed what was happening around you. When you tire of being lionized, come and pay us a visit."

"You are marrying Vera Bayne?" asked the captain, a sharp pang of jealousy stabbing him.

"No," smiled Lutterel, wisely. "She's a fine, brave girl; but my fancy as a quiet man runs to quiet women. Her sister, Constance, captain."

"You are a strange man, Mr. Lutterel," said Captain Denham, his face clearing. "You should have been—a——"

"Pirate, I suppose," smiled Lutterel. "Well, captain, I build churches, it is true; but an ancestor of mine, one Harry Morgan, destroyed greater churches, and more of them, than I shall ever build."

SPOILT

By E. Milne-Skillman.

Author of "*The Price*," "*Foiled*," etc.

Sylvia Desmond was passionate and mercenary. She married old Desmond for wealth and position. He was a great writer and professor. She was young and beautiful, sparkling, and full of the joy of living when he married her, and to him like a child to be loaded with gifts. Although wealthy he was always writing books and giving lectures—it was his great hobby. He was looked up to and respected by all nations. At first she laughed and sang about the house and in the beautiful grounds, and would sit patiently whilst he would give part of his last lecture, and tell her the reception he received, or give her extracts from one of his books or articles, but later on her gaze would wander and she would cease to listen, but he never noticed it, he would be so absorbed in his subject.

Regularly at ten-thirty every night he would kiss her, and go to his study to write and think. And the next morning at ten-thirty he would kiss those red lips again. Since the first few months of their marriage he had not been an ardent lover. So she became bored. It was so lonely in this great mansion with no young society to converse with and nothing to do all day long. It was her birthday. Her husband had bought her a new motor car, the old one which he always drove himself he would use entirely to take him to various towns where he lectured and

attended meetings with other great men of science. Summer had arrived, and he wished her to drive about and enjoy herself, and enjoy herself she did. He had engaged a chauffeur, a Frenchman, and at the same time another maid, also French; he thought it would help Sylvia to keep up her French. The chauffeur was a young, tall, finely-built chap, well shaped nose, dark flashing eye, sleek black hair, strong jaw and mouth, with a dash of cruelty about his thin lips. He had rather a primitive touch about him that she admired, and an air of sophistication that intrigued her.

Day after day she would ride out, quite content to sit back and watch Jean driving. She thought he was a fine chauffeur. He would always look straight ahead when she addressed him, and answer: "Certainly, Madame," and touch his cap deferentially. One day, when requesting Marie the maid to tell Jean that she would require the car earlier than usual, she remarked: "By the way, Marie, have you noticed Jean?"

"No, Madame, not particular. I am too occupied."

"Haven't you noticed something—something crude about him. He is an excellent chauffeur and a perfect mechanic, but the man himself? Don't you think"—Sylvia was feeling her way—"that he has a certain——"

Marie said she had noticed that he was a big, strong man, and, ah, yes, perhaps he has a certain way—a certain——

"Look," said Sylvia.

"Ah, yes, that is it, Madame, a certain look," agreed Marie.

Sylvia was thinking rapidly and said, raising a warning finger, "You had better keep away from him; he is not the type of man for a pretty, vivacious girl like you——"

Marie smiled at Madame's kind advice, and

assured her that she had much better ways of occupying her spare time than by carrying on with Jean.

Sylvia was pleased. The next day a tyre went; while Jean was putting a new one on she sat by the roadside, displaying plenty of leg, watching and admiring his figure and his strong, capable hands, with the well-shaped nails and fingers. Suddenly she said to him: "Why did you leave your beautiful country to come over here?"

"I can make a better living, Madame."

"And when you have made a lot I suppose you will go back and marry some little maid of France. You hot-blooded men! How many hearts have you broken, eh?"

"The car is ready now, Madame," said Jean, and smiled.

"Oh, that look," said Sylvia to herself.

When they got back she told him that she wished to have another drive through the country after dinner, and he was to call for her at nine o'clock.

. . . . . .

Her husband would not be back until *late* that night. Her eyes glistened. How slow the hours seemed to drag. She could not eat much, and kept watching the clock. She sat at the piano for a little while and played a dreamy waltz. Marie came to ask her if she would prefer her to postpone her night out—two of the servants had been granted a holiday—would Madame feel quite safe alone?

"Yes, that's all right, Marie, I shall not be afraid."

At nine-thirty there was a ring. Sylvia opened the door herself. It was Jean. She told him that his master was coming back shortly, and would like to drive with her—*her own make up*—will he come in and wait? She had answered the door herself because she is *quite alone*, and Sylvia *emphasised*

those words too. He entered. Will he come up, as she did not want to bother to come down again, and it is more pleasant in her boudoir. He followed her in. The lights were softly shaded, and a faint seductive aroma was in the air. The divan looked very inviting. Why not wait here for her husband ?

" But I shall be intruding on Madame's privacy," said Jean.

" Oh, no, Madame is very interested in what he told her this morning."

She went over to the divan and sat down ; then told him to sit down beside her. Then she questioned him about his life in France, and slyly asked him how many girls he flirted with in France.

" I do not think that it would interest you, Madame, the doings of us common people."

She told him it did interest her, and that she loved the natural, primitive people who are *not* artificial, but sincere, and she felt certain that they made *perfect lovers.* Her green eyes gazed into his face as she admired " that certain look " in his face.

" Does Madame like that sort of love ? " and this time he looked straight into her eyes.

" What do you mean, ' that kind of love ' ? What other love is there ? That is the love I want, Jean."

She closed her eyes. She felt his strong arms steal round her, and his warm breath on her face. A delicious tremor ran through her. He is closer, he is very near those red lips. He——.

" What is this, eh ? " screamed a voice from the door.

Sylvia jumped up and turned to find Marie confronting her.

" What are you doing here ? " shouted Sylvia in a great rage, and thought inwardly, oh, if she had only waited five minutes longer !

"What are *you* doing, I should like to know, with

my *husband?*" said Marie, her voice shaking with temper.

"What? Your husband? You told me that you didn't know Jean! Why did you tell me that lie?"

She had told Madame that lie because she had wanted a *single* maid, and they needed the money so much for their little baby, who was sick and ill, and besides, Madame had insinuated such dreadful things about Jean that she had dared not tell her. Marie would *not* be consoled. To think that Madame should take her husband, a poor, simple man of the people, when there were so many men of her own class on the look out for—but what is that? That must be Monsieur. Marie is gazing out of the window. Yes, it is he coming up the drive. Thank heaven for that.

"You say that is my husband coming!" cried Sylvia frantically. "Then both of you clear out, quick. I'll settle with you to-morrow. Do *hurry*."

To-morrow? Oh no, Marie will see Monsieur *to-night*, and tell him everything.

"No, no, not for all the world! He will never forgive me; he will hate me and never trust me again. He must never know. Go quickly please. I swear that I will arrange a settlement with you to-morrow morning. Please go."

Then Madame had better pay to-night. Not that money would compensate for what Madame had done, but it's their poor little baby that needs such a lot that she was thinking about. Has Madame a hundred pounds in cash?

"A hundred in cash! I have only two or three pounds," cried Sylvia, as she hurriedly opened her platinum chain bag.

Then if Madame has no money handy she must give them the pearl rope that she often wears; that would be as good as money.

"I cannot," shrieked Sylvia. "How could I explain it to him? That was his wedding present to me."

Marie shrugged her shoulders; that was Madame's affair. Ah, that is Monsieur's step in the hall! In the hall! In a moment he will be up here, thought Sylvia; she rushed to her jewel case, took out the rope of beautiful pearls and thrust them in Marie's hand.

"I cannot carry them like that, Madame, I'll carry them in this bag," said Marie, and picking up Sylvia's platinum bag she pushed the pearls in it, and turning to Jean said: "Come along, you wretch," and they hurried out of the room.

Sylvia waited. Her husband was a long time coming up. Why doesn't he come upstairs? Surely Marie is not telling him all about it! What a fool she has been! To think that Jean is the husband of that wench Marie, and a dirty, squealing baby in a garret perhaps in Paris. How she loathed him now!

Suddenly the telephone bell rang; it is her *husband's voice;* his car had broken down; would she send Jean along with her car to pick him up.

After she had finished with the 'phone Sylvia sat in her thin silk negligée, thinking it all over. There is something strange about it all. Gradually it dawned upon her. She had been duped. Yes, undoubtedly! Marie and Jean were not servants at all, but crooks, and clever crooks, to get into a good house like this. Yes, now she feels certain about it. It is not so bad after all. Jean, very likely is not Marie's husband at all, and the baby? Probably sob stuff. She gazed around her, looked at the table where her platinum mesh bag had lain half an hour ago, and then at the open jewel case. Rotten luck; but never mind, her husband would buy her another bag and another rope of pearls.

Then she looked at the divan where she had sat with Jean—Jean of the large black, flashing eyes, the strong arms, the nice hands and "that certain look." She looked, and felt sad, then her lips trembled and her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, if Marie had only waited just a *few minutes longer*," she murmured.

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